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*of Yesterday and To-day*

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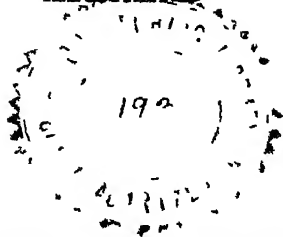
A TUDOR TALE

J. Reason

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## HOW MUCH IS TRUE?

IN a story that is partly history, you are bound to wonder how much really happened, and which of the characters are real people. Some of the people and happenings are in history books, of course, and you have probably heard of them—Henry VIII, for instance, Sebastian Cabot, Cardinal Wolsey, Sir Thomas More, Erasmus, and so forth. But others are not so well known. So if you are interested, here are a few notes.

Robert Beccingham did found Guildford Grammar School, but I don't know that he was really related to Thomas Polstead. They certainly were friends. Richard, his brother, was a trustee for the money left to the school after Robert died.

John Parkyn was Mayor of Guildford in 1516; Norbrigg, Smallpiece, and Brother Geoffrey are names of people living in Guildford about that time. The Elrington family were great ironworkers, and Tom Elrington became wealthy and married Beatrice Bray, who belonged to a very great family.

I wonder if you were surprised to find cricket mentioned. It is quite true that cricket was played on the bear-baiting ground at Guildford, and that is the earliest reference to cricket that we know of. The description of old Guildford is as true as I could make it; but I confess that I don't know what the Fish Cross was really like. I only know that it was there. There is a brewery now where the friary used to be! Some people think that Rack's Close is where prisoners used to be tortured, but that isn't so. As I have said, it is where the weavers used to stretch their cloth. The caves are still there.

John Rastell, the printer, brother-in-law of Thomas More, is a real person. His son Will also became a printer.

The unlucky expedition by sea, and John Ravyn's mutiny, are perfectly true ; and Thomas More did go down to Sandwich to inquire about the silting up of the harbour—but I don't know if he was there when Rastell came home !

The apprentices' riot on 'Evil May Day' is also history, and everything described there, except the adventures of the boys, really happened. Peter Coo is real, but to be quite honest, all I know about him is that he took part in the riot and afterwards made trouble on Rastell's voyage.

Old St. Paul's, as perhaps you know, was burned down in 1666, in the Great Fire of London. You may have seen pictures of it, and perhaps the pictures showed a square tower and not a spire. But it did have a spire in the time of Henry VIII, only the spire was burned in 1561, when Elizabeth was queen.

Sir Thomas More's book, *Utopia*, was translated into English after his death. Perhaps some of you will read it some time, and if you can get over the queer old words you will find parts of it very interesting and amusing. Thomas More was one of the wittiest, kindest, and most delightful people who ever lived, and if I have made him 'come alive' for you out of the pages of history, I shall be glad.

Explanations of unusual words are given at the end of the book.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SCHOOLHOUSE

TOM, Dick, and Robin used to say afterwards that it all began on that November day of 1516—the day before the bear-baiting. Certainly that was what made it hard to attend to one's Latin declensions in the dark little school-room of Guildford town, and Brother Geoffrey, the young schoolmaster who climbed every day up the hill from the friary by the river, had his hands full with excited small boys whose heads were full of the morrow's holiday. So the older boys were left to get on with their exercitations as best they could.

That was all very well for Dick, youngest son of the mayor and the best scholar in the school. Dick found Latin perfectly easy, and had even coaxed Brother Geoffrey into starting him with Greck. But Tom was interested only in mathematics, and Robin, though he would listen to Dick's stories from Virgil by the hour, made a sorry mess of his own translations and never could keep figures in his head at all. Which was a pity, since next year he was to be apprenticed to Master Parkyn, the cloth merchant, Dick's father; and as Brother Geoffrey sometimes pointed out, tартly, he would be no use whatever unless he could add and subtract correctly.

But that afternoon the three heads—black, chestnut, and straw-coloured—were very close together, and the talk going on under the cover of shrill small boys' voices was not about lessons—nor bear-baiting either.

'“If it's guns the King's Grace is wanting,” my father said, “there's as good iron in Surrey, aye, and wood for charcoal too—as ever came out of Sussex weald. And I know where it's to be found.” That was the old king Harry the Seventh, of course,’ Tom Elrington broke off

to explain. A strand of his black hair fell forward and tickled his nose, and he brushed it back with a large brown hand. 'So my father sold out his land in Sussex and bought a parcel of ground at Abinger, and there set up his ironworks.'

'Yes, but,' interrupted Robin, 'what has all that got to do with Sebastian Cabot and his voyage to the New Found Land? That's what I want to hear.'

'Have patience, you chestnut-top! I'm telling you. You know how old Cabot, the Venetian, Sebastian's father, sailed for the west—must ha' been full twenty years ago, for my father was a boy then. It was he brought the news of a fair new land well north of what the Spaniards claimed. And after old Jonn died, Sebastian was for ever begging and pleading with old Harry to fit out an expedition and claim the New Found Land for England—to set off what yon Columbus claimed for Spain, d' ye see?'

'I'd ha' seen to it that he had the ships if I'd been king!' Robin's voice went high with excitement, and Tom nudged him sharply to be quiet. 'But old Harry was a skinflint, wasn't he? I just remember when he died, seven years since, and every one rejoiced and said how things would be different. There were bonfires on all the hills—like last February when the little Princess Mary was born.'

'If you want to hear about Sebastian Cabot, don't talk so much!' Tom scolded him. 'It was when he had high hopes of getting his ships that he came seeking all the ironmasters of Sussex, and bargaining like a huckster to get them good cheap. My father was sure he'd get a part at least of the order. But he didn't—and a rare rage he was in over the disappointment.'

'Why didn't he?' asked Robin.

'First because Cabot didn't get his ships. King Harry—I mean our own King, Harry the Eighth—had just married the Spanish princess, our good Queen Catherine, and naturally he didn't want trouble with Spain.'

'Couldn't Spain be content with what she'd got a'ready?' said Robin hotly.

'Seemingly not. And next the king wanted all the guns he could get for his war with France. Leastways that was what Sebastian told my father, sitting in the forge and drinking mulled ale, which he said he'd come to like better than Italian wines.'

'And that was how you came to meet Sebastian Cabot!' Robin's eyes glowed. 'What was he like?'

'Well, to say the truth, I didn't take to him, and no more did father. He was a great talker, and made out that it was he who'd done most of the discovering. But as he couldn't ha' been above eighteen at the time, my father reckoned the credit should ha' gone to the old man, John. Anyway, Sebastian kicked his heels in England for three years, and then gave up and went home to Venice.'

'That was hard on your father,' Dick spoke for the first time, lifting his large grey eyes from his work.

'Oh, father didn't care,' said Tom. 'He had his hands full with work, and he didn't wholly trust Sebastian. He'd just bought his land at Abinger, and was planning to make a hammer-pond—which he would ha' done by now, but for those proud-stomached Brays,' he added disgustedly.

'What's a hammer-pond? And what have the Brays to do with it?' asked Robin, who knew the Brays as one of the great Surrey families. His mind was more on the disappointed Cabot and the New Found Land across the Atlantic than on the troubles of Tom's father, and he asked the question absent-mindedly. He had never seen the sea, but—perhaps because of the stories Dick told of the travels of Aeneas—it drew his thoughts and his longings like a kind of spell.

However, he was not to learn anything about ponds just then, for a cold, clear voice cut into the boys' talk from across the classroom.

'Thomas Elrington! Robertus Polstead! Ricardus Parkyn! Stand up, all of you!'

Dick jumped to his feet instantly, looking flushed and guilty, though he was less to blame than either of the others. Robin was up next, his chestnut head held at a jaunty angle, and his bright hazel eyes sliding sideways to his cousin Dick, who must be saved from a beating at all costs. Last up was Tom Elrington, a sardonic grin on his lean brown face, and the black lock tumbling again over his big nose. He lounged to his feet lazily and stood with his thumbs hooked in his belt, taller than either of his friends, though only six months older, being well past fourteen.

Brother Geoffrey looked the three sinners over severely.

'No doubt,' he said in Latin, 'you have all of you finished your exercitation. But is that any reason why you should be speaking the English tongue in school hours?'

That was Brother Geoffrey all over—he always managed to make one feel so small! He knew perfectly well that not one of them had finished his exercitation.

'Dick has very nearly finished his,' Robin broke out impetuously, 'and he would have done it if Tom and I hadn't been talking.'

'Latin, if you please, Robertus! The subject of your conversation, then, was of such surpassing interest as to draw Ricardus away from Vergilius and his excellent works. And what were you speaking of?' Brother Geoffrey snapped suddenly.

'Sebastian Cabot,' Robin answered hastily.

'Guns!' added Tom in one explosive word.

'Thomas and Robertus do not seem to agree. Ricardus, can you enlighten me? Be silent, Robertus. Let him speak for himself.'

Dick, looking small and slender beside sturdy Robin and long Tom, fidgeted nervously as he tried to remember what they had been talking about. He was only half attending, anyhow.

'I think it was about the New Found Land,' he said at last, in beautiful Latin. 'And I have not by any means finished my exercitation.'

Brother Geoffrey stood looking at the trio, and none of his feelings showed on his face. They were the biggest boys in the school, and Dick was the most promising pupil he had ever had. Brother Geoffrey had just succeeded in persuading Mayor Parkyn that his clever son ought to be sent to study at Oxford. To be sure, he was very young, but boys went to college much earlier in those days. Dick would give no trouble if it were not for his friends. Robin—Brother Geoffrey did not believe he was stupid, but certainly he was no scholar and a terrible scamp. As for Tom, Brother Geoffrey did not pretend to understand him. He took not the slightest trouble to master Latin, but his mathematics were much better than his schoolmaster's. Brother Geoffrey was afraid the boy knew it!

'H'm!' he said at last. 'So the exertations are not completed. Very well. You shall bring them to me at noon to-morrow.'

Three jaws dropped in consternation.

'But to-morrow is the bear-baiting!' Robin, of course, got his word in first.

'It is always a holiday,' said Dick loyally. He did not care about the bear-baiting himself, but he did mind his friends' disappointment.

'I shall not come,' Tom defied his schoolmaster.

The small boys on the other side of the room were nudging one another and giggling with joy at this splendid rebellion. Brother Geoffrey found himself in rather a hole. This bear-baiting was one of Guildford's regular annual events. As early as May the burgesses began to plan for it, for this was no hole-in-the-corner affair, but a function, at which the great and lesser folks from all the country round, Westons, Stoughtons, Holdhursts, Eliots, Butlers, and Brays, would attend. Bets would be laid on



the various dogs, and a good deal of unofficial business would be arranged at the mayor's dinner afterwards. What the boys looked forward to, of course, apart from the combat between dogs and bear, were the side shows—tumblers, pedlars, and gipsies—almost as many as at St. Catherine's or Shalford Fair. It was too much to expect boys to stay away for the sake of an exercitation. To tell the truth, the schoolmaster had clean forgotten the bear-baiting! But he had spoken, and it would never do to go back on his word. And Tom Elrington had defied him.

'Would you prefer a whipping, sirrah?' he demanded.

'I should very much prefer it,' said Tom.

'And so would I,' piped up Dick.

'What!' Brother Geoffrey turned on him. 'I am astonished that you, Ricardus, should prefer a barbarous and brutal spectacle to your studies.'

'It is not that,' Dick hastily explained. 'But my father expects us all to be present because he is the mayor this year. So I would like a beating, please, and I will bring you the exercitation in the evening.'

'And you, Robertus?'

Now Robin was in a worse dilemma than Brother Geoffrey. On the one hand he did not want to miss the bear-baiting; on the other he did not want his cousin Dick to be flogged. Dick was not strong, and his spirit was often too much for his body. So Robin would not vote for the thrashing. He knit his brows and puzzled furiously.

'Sir,' he blurted out at last, 'if I were to bring you the exertions myself, at noon to-morrow, need anybody be beaten?'

'So you would miss part of the bear-baiting,' Brother Geoffrey pointed out. A little twitch at the corner of his mouth betrayed that he wanted to smile.

'That can't be helped, sir. Anyway I was the most to blame. I asked Tom to tell me about how he met Sebastian Cabot.'

'There was no need for me to have told him,' remarked Tom indifferently.

'Nor for me to have listened,' supported Dick.

How these three did hang together, Brother Geoffrey reflected.

'Well,' he agreed, 'since Robertus takes the blame, and I suspect he is right, he shall be the one to bring the exercitations. But if they are not all finished, the whipping post stands in the schoolyard, and you all know what it is for.'

The three culprits bowed in their best manner.

'And now to prayers,' Brother Geoffrey went on briskly. 'It's late, and you'll hardly get your suppers before choir practice at St. Mary's.'

That did not affect Tom, Dick, or Robin. Tom's voice was breaking, Dick could not sing a note in tune, and Robin had long ago been turned out of the choir for playing pranks.

As the boys tumbled out, in the gathering dusk, into the muddy lane that ran between the schoolhouse and the castle ditch, Tom Elrington grabbed Robin's shoulder.

'What a plague had you, Robin, to promise our screeds by noon to-morrow? Dick can get his done, but never you or me. I haven't started mine.'

'We'll borrow Dick's to copy,' said Robin serenely. 'We can do it by candle-light this evening.'

'But——' Dick sounded worried. 'Would it be right? I don't mind, of course, only ——'

'Perfectly right,' argued Robin. 'I promised to bring the exercitations, but I didn't promise we would do them ourselves.'

'Brother Geoffrey will certainly guess,' chuckled Tom.

'He will,' Robin agreed. 'And you and I, Tom, will get a whipping next day. But we shall not miss the bear-baiting. D'ye care?'

'Not I.'

They dived through Black Horse Lane, which led to the

High Street, which was nearly all there was of Guildford town in those days. The high, gabled houses of the wealthier burgesses stood about half way up, with the Market Hall straddling the street between them. Mayor Parkyn's house was opposite the Fish Cross, an arched stone shelter with a cross on top to which the fishermen of the river Wey brought their fish on market days. Down by the river, round about the mill dam and St. Mary's church, clustered the cottages of the oldest part of the town.

The three boys did not go into the High Street, but through a gate which opened into a large yard behind the mayor's house. Here were his stables and the long weaving shed where 'prntices and journeymen made the blue cloth for which Guildford and the neighbouring towns of Farnham and Godalming were famous. Here, too, were the dyeing vats where blue-armed workmen dipped the yarn spun by the cottagers. The cloth itself was stretched on frames in the field called Racks Close, on the other side of the castle, under a steep chalk cliff.

Tom, whose home at Abinger was too far off for a daily journey, was living with Master Parkyn's family while he got his schooling; and Robin, who lived out at Stoke, often spent the night at his uncle's during the winter months.

There was a pleasant smell of supper in the long candle-lit room above the shop, where Mistress Parkyn and Gill, her maid, hot-faced both, were busy over the fire at one end. Master Parkyn was very up to date, and had a chimney; but the crowded houses in the High Street did not allow for large kitchens, and a good deal of the cooking was done over the living-room fire. The two women were much inconvenienced by the legs of Master Parkyn and his two elder sons, John and William, who were engaged in a loud-voiced discussion.

'I tell you,' the little mayor was saying peevishly, 'it's no small danger to have an untried bear for to-morrow.

How do we know if he 'll make good sport? Sir Edmund Bray will be there, and I should be shamed if——'

'Oh, ha' done, father!' John growled sulkily. 'What would you have me do? Was it my fault the old bear died a week since? I was lucky to get this one, a young one too, from that strolling mummer.'

'He 'll make good sport, never fear,' said William blithely. 'I poked 'en with a stick, and a reared up and struck out bravely.'

'Will Jenkyn the bearward manage him, d' ye think?' fussed the mayor. 'I've heard Sir Edmund's bringing his lady, and his son and daughter too . . . they'll be frightened if the bear is too fierce. I'm sure I shall be glad when this year's over. The foolish things a man has to do as mayor, what with the mummeries of the Summer King, and the guildsmen's dinners—a sore expense, that—and the processions on St. Blaize's Day. And this year all that extra revelry on the birth of the princess, God save her. I shall be a ruined man. And there's still the Christmas revels. Would I'd never taken office.'

'You knew what it 'd be,' said John. 'You were mayor afore, thirteen years back.'

'I was younger then, and trade was better. I dunno what's coming to the town of late. Could I only win my suit against Wills of Bramley, I'd retire.'

'You'd best drop that lawsuit, you'll never get aught from it.' Mistress Parkyn dumped a bowl of stewed cels on the long table, just as Gill staggered in with a huge pasty from the oven outside. 'Come, fall to, for supper's ready. Dick, call the 'prentices.'

Dick shouted from the window, and half a dozen youths ran with a clatter across the yard and up the stairs. The senior apprentice came up from the shop, where he had been putting up the shutters, and they all sat down at the long table. The family, including Robin and Tom, sat above the salt cellar—a fine, heavy piece of silver wrought

with the castle and woolsacks of the Guildford arms. Next year Robin would be down below with the other boys. He thought it might be more fun than sitting close under the eye of his uncle and older cousins.

As soon as they had finished supper the three boys excused themselves and scrambled up the steep staircase to the attic which they shared. There was not much room in it, though the three pallets on the floor took up less space than bedsteads would have done, for under the high small window was a trestle table which Dick used for his studies. The room was chilly, for, of course, there was no fire, but it would have to grow much colder before the charcoal stove would be brought upstairs.

'Now then,' Robin cried, groping for the tinder box and kindling the tallow candle which stood on the table, 'to it, lads! Dick, you read out the words while Tom and I write for dear life.'

'You 'll have to be quick, or mother will be after us,' said Dick, opening his book. 'She can't abide to waste candle light. Can't we get it done to-morrow?'

'What, waste the daylight indoors? Not I! There 'll be a thousand things to do to-morrow.'

Two pens scratched busily while Dick dictated as far as he had got. Then, more slowly, he dictated while he wrote. But they had done little more than half before Mistress Parkyn's voice came shrilly up the stairs.

'Dick! Tom! Robin! Why aren't ye abed, ye knaves, burning the good candles? Ye 'd be thrifter if ye had the making of them.'

'I told you so,' whispered Dick, and then shouted: 'All right, mother, we 'll to bed straight.'

Tom rose and stretched himself, his long arms making goblin shadows on the sloping roof.

'I 'm ready, for one,' he yawned. 'Can scarce keep my eyes open.'

'I 'm tired, too.' Dick had dark smudges under his eyes.

'We'll have to be up betimes, that's all.' Robin sanded his writing. 'I wish I were through with lessons—what's the use of them to me?'

'If you don't put out that candle,' squealed Mistress Parkyn from below, 'I'll come up and take it from you!'

Robin hastily crushed the extinguisher over the wick—which sent out a most vile smell—and the three boys dragged off their clothes and huddled naked into bed in the dark.



A TUDOR MERCHANT

## CHAPTER II

### THE BAITING

Down by the river was the bear pit. You reached it by the river path which the boys called Bear Lane, but which their more dignified elders called Friary Lane, for it ran by the friary walls. Beyond the river lay the royal park, and the mansion where royalty had often stayed since the decay of the castle. Handsome young Harry the Eighth sometimes hunted here, but this year he was away up in London, and the great gates had no interest for the boys who splashed helter-skelter along the lane.

Tom, Dick, and Robin, delayed by finishing their translation, found a crowd of lads and men already hanging over the stockade and teasing surly Bruin, who sat with his thick legs flat out in front of him, rocking from side to side and grumbling. Jenkyn the bearward, as surly as his charge, was trying to stop the crowd from shying stones and rotten apples.

'Ha' done, do!' he snorted. 'Ye 'll have him that out o' temper Peter and me 'll never fetch him peaceable to the field. He ain't like old Pompey, I 'd have ye know. A cross-grained one, if ever I knew a bear.'

'All the better sport!' someone shouted. 'Tickle him up, lads, that 's right. Ah, he 's a brave 'un!'

'He 'll make a better showing than old Pompey, who 'd lost half his teeth,' remarked Robin, eyeing the bear critically.

'If I were you, Jenkyn,' advised Tom, 'I 'd look to that chain of his.'

'What 's the matter with his chain? It 's a new one, just made by Lambert Smith, and strong enough to hold five bears, so he says.'

'Then either he 's a liar, or he don't know one end of an

anvil from the other,' retorted Tom. 'Look to the third link from the stake, I tell you.'

'I sees naught wrong wi' it,' grumbled Jenkyn.

'Never heed him! 'Tis only young Tom Elrington, whose father came out o' silly Sussex 'cause they weren't silly enough for him,' shouted an ill-favoured youngster.

'A thinks 'a knows all about iron, but 'a 'll find us Surrey folks knows a thing or so too. Old Hammer-ponds!'

Robin flushed up to his chestnut curls, and his fists clenched. But Tom took not the slightest notice.

'You mark my words, that 's all,' he said to Jenkyn and turned slouching away. 'Come on, lads,' he added in a lower tone, 'let 's away up to the field and get good places before the rabble swarms up yonder.'

'We 'll have a long time to wait, and it 's cold,' Dick objected, shivering a little. 'I 've a mind to go home. I think bear-baiting 's silly, anyway.'

'So do I,' agreed Tom, surprisingly. 'It 's a waste of good dogs. I 'd sooner go hawking.'

'Well, if you aren't a couple of——!' Robin paused, at a loss for a word. 'To think it 's me that 's to take the books to Brother Geoffrey—the only one who enjoys the sport!'

'I 'll take them, if you like,' offered Dick.

'Oh, no, you don't. I said I would, and I will. Besides——' Robin screwed up his eyes knowingly. 'I never heard before you didn't care for the bear-baiting, and I 'll not believe it now. You can't fool me.'

The others, seeing that their good-natured pretence was seen through, burst into laughter. But in a minute Dick said thoughtfully:

'You know, I believe I wasn't feigning. I do feel differently about it this year. Brother Geoffrey was right, and it 's a barbarous sport.'

'Is it any worse than driving deer round a fenced park to be shot at?' asked Tom.



'I wish you two would stop!' Robin cried. 'I've always enjoyed bear-baiting, hunting, and cock-fighting, and now you 're making me think about it—and I don't want to.'

'That 's your trouble,' said Tom with friendly rudeness. 'Dick and me, we've got something inside our heads, you've naught but feathers. Nay, don't you go for me here. I've no mind to roll in the mud in my new jerkin; and you 'll spoil those handsome slashed sleeves of yours.'

So Robin contented himself with punching his friend in the ribs. They were nearly at the top now of the lane that ran to the north of the town and was known as North Ditch, because of the trench that had been dug long ago to make a rude fortification. But Guildford had never stood a siege, and the ditch was mostly used as a sawpit now, being full of timber. Beyond it the earth had been thrown up into a bank, and this gave a good view of the field where the bear-baiting had been held yearly ever since any one could remember.

The three boys leaped across the ditch and picked a good position on top of the bank. A stout stake had been driven into the middle of the field to tether the bear, and on the higher ground benches were set for the burgesses and any of the county notables who might have ridden over to see the sights. Already gipsies and pedlars were squabbling for good stands, and a tumbler was doing a few preliminary exercises to limber up. The boys had not long been settled before a crowd began to gather, and in about half an hour the bank was lined with small boys, pushing, jostling, slipping down and scrambling up again, and accusing each other in piercing voices of having taken somebody else's place while they weren't looking.

Then came the men with their dogs, a mongrel crowd mostly, loudly praising their strength, courage, and the grip of their jaws. The mayor and burgesses, muffled up against the chill wind, came picking their way carefully

through the mud and sat down pretending to be bored by the whole show, though actually they enjoyed it as much as anybody. Up trotted a party on horseback—Sir Edmund Bray and the Lady Isabella, their young son Owen and their little daughter Beatrice. Presently they were joined by the Westons of Shere.

Tom stared scowlingly at the gentry.

‘What’s ailing you, Tom, that you glower so?’ inquired Robin.

‘Oh, nothing—but those are the folk that hamper my father at every turn. They won’t let him dam the pond at Abinger for his water-hammer, nor let our charcoal burners cut wood enough for the smelting. Have to get all our timber from Vachery. Ah w’e’l, we ’ll show ’em yet!’ He relapsed into a brooding silence.

‘Oy!’ exclaimed Robin. ‘Hark ’ee! Here comes Master Bruin.’

Sure enough, a great shouting proclaimed that Jenkyn and his helpers—stout pikeman of the town guard—were urging their charge up the hill. Jenkyn hauled on the chain, the pikeman by pricks and buffetings kept Bruin in more or less the right direction, and a yelling, laughing mob of young roughs made things as difficult as possible for them by pelting the poor beast with anything that came handy.

‘Ye spawn o’ Satan, let be!’ Jenkyn was swearing between puffs. ‘Sarve ye right if a turns on ye—ha! Fuff! A murrain, a pest, and a palsy light on ye, ye gibbering—fuff! Ha!—fools. What d’ ye think ye are—a pack o’ cur dogs? Would the bear ’d rip ye open—I ’ll never get un to the stake at this rate!’

But he did, however, and Bruin, red-eyed with rage, stood swinging his heavy head from side to side, drooling and snarling his baffled fury at the end of his chain, while the leashed dogs yapped and howled their defiance.

At that moment the friary bell began to toll.

'Mercy on us, it's all but noon!' Robin jumped to his feet. 'I'd forgotten the time. I must be off—and I shall miss all the best of it. Keep my place!'

He thrust the crowd of boys right and left, slid down the bank and sprang across the ditch, then ran like a hare between the houses, across the almost deserted High Street, and through the alley way to the schoolhouse. Just as the bell ceased tolling he was at the door. There he paused for a moment to straighten his twisted hose, swept off his flat cap, ran his fingers through his rumpled curls, drew a deep breath, and entered.

There sat Brother Geoffrey at his desk, his lean face bent over a book. He did not look up as Robin entered, and the boy stood, shuffling from foot to foot, impatient to get the business over and be back at the fun. He knew very well that the schoolmaster was aware of him, but he dared not make a sound. If he vexed Brother Geoffrey, he would only be kept longer.

At last the friar lifted his head.

'Come hither, Robertus,' he said in Latin, without a smile. Robin advanced, holding out the papers. The friar took them and laid them side by side spread out before him—Tom's in small, cramped writing, neat to look at but hard to read, Dick's clear and easy-flowing, Robin's an unhandy scrawl.

'Is this thy best script, Robertus?' he asked severely.

'It is, Domine,' faltered Robin.

'I doubt I'll never make a penman of thee. Hey, what is this?' Geoffrey bent his brows. 'Word for word, they tally exactly. Now do not tell me that the muse hath so inspired you three that you rendered Virgil his eclogue into English so similar. Whose translation is this?'

'Dick's, please you! You—you didn't say . . . you told us to show you a translation in our best writing . . . but . . .'

'Robertus, Robertus! Of what avail is the obedience to the letter without the spirit? Didst thou think to deceive me?'

'No, I didn't!' burst out Robin, falling into English. 'I thought you—I thought you knew what we meant to do . . . you—you smiled. At least I saw your lips twitch.'

Brother Geoffrey really did smile then.

'Why then, all 's well,' he said in quite a different tone. 'So thou art always honest, honest with thyself, Robert—I 'll forgive thee that thou 'lt never be a scholar. Yet it 's a strange thing that with all this new life there is, coming to us from Italy and ancient Greece, I cannot get thee to find the joy there is in books!'

'I like it very well when our Dickon tells us the old tales o' nights,' confessed Robin. 'But for making out the crabbed Latin myself, that 's beyond me. Books that are written in English, now—tales of voyaging to new lands overseas—I wish there were more of them. That was why we were talking in class yesterday,' he added. 'Tom's father knew Sebastian Cabot, and I wanted to hear. When I've done my 'prenticeship, I'll be a merchant adventurer, and seek out New Found Lands to sell my goods in . . . and bring back gold and spices.'

'Thy good uncle may have somewhat to say to that,' commented Brother Geoffrey. 'But I wouldn't wish to dishearten thee. We are living in great days, boy—wonderful days. I doubt not that all of ye have your parts to play. Well—thou art itching to return to thy sport, and I 'll not keep thee—though I wish that it were something nobler than watching poor dumb beasts tear each other for men's pleasure. One minute more, Robertus. Dost thou know *why* I summoned thee at just this time?'

Robin hung his head and scraped with his foot. He dared not say what he thought—that it was just a bit of spiteful punishment on Geoffrey's part.

'I 'll tell thee, Robertus. It was to test thee—no matter how. Now I know more of thee—and maybe thou 'lt remember that crabbed Brother Geoffrey is yet thy friend. Now go!'

Robin—his round face flushed and his hazel eyes bright—did not know how uncommonly handsome he looked at that moment. But he did know that the friar's eyes rested on him kindly as he bowed and backed away, and his resentment at the punishment had quite vanished as he closed the schoolhouse door and dashed off at top speed to rejoin his friends.

Something was happening at the bear-baiting! More than the usual clamour of barking dogs and cheering watchers rang through the still autumn air—screams, yells, and a furious trampling, a hubbub of voices all shouting at once so that nobody could be heard. As Robin reached the North Ditch he could not see the cause of it, because of the bank, but the ditch was full of struggling, tumbling, white-faced boys, all mixed up with the balks of timber, and more were sliding and rolling down on top of those already there.

'The bear! The bear! The bear's loose!' they screamed as Robin came up.

'Where's Dick? Where's Tom?' he demanded, searching right and left for his friends. But all were too maddened by terror to talk sense.

Avoiding the worst tangle Robin scrambled up, fearless of danger in his worry for Dick. Tom, he reckoned, could look after himself, but Dick was inclined to be dreamy and apt to get into trouble through absent-mindedness. Where on earth *was* Dick?

At the top of the bank Robin had at last a clear view of what was going on. The catastrophe could only have happened a few minutes before he arrived. There was the bear, dragging a length of broken chain (Tom had been quite right about the weak link); there were several dogs, yapping defiance but afraid to close in—and no wonder, for six of their number lay writhing and bleeding where the cruel talons had struck them down; there were the pikemen cautiously closing in, sweat of fear standing out on

their white faces; there was his uncle the mayor twisting his hands in frantic anxiety; Lady Isabella Bray in a dead faint in her husband's arms, and—what on earth was that tumble of blue velvet on the ground, horribly near to the paws of the freed bear?

'St. Catherine aid us! It's the little Mistress Beatrice!' thought Robin. 'Why doesn't someone snatch the child away?'

At that very moment someone did. A long, lean boy's figure squirmed past the pikemen and hooked a sinewy arm over her body.

'Well done, Tom!' shrieked Robin, hurling himself down the bank on to the field. 'Oh, heaven! The bear will have them both!'

Bruin had lurched forward with deadly paw upraised. But before that paw descended came a sharp yank at his collar—someone had had the wit to seize the end of the trailing chain and pull it sharply. Furious, the creature wheeled round and charged in the opposite direction.

The pikemen, relieved of their fear for little Beatrice, charged in to the attack. Robin flew like an arrow over the field and was just in time to sweep aside the slender, dazed-looking boy who stood with the end of the chain in his hand, before the whole mass of bear and men should fall in a heap on the top of him. As it was they were knocked sprawling, rolling over and over in the bloody mud and damaging their fine holiday suits beyond repair.

'Are you hurt, Dick? You ass, you dolt, you gallant little jackanapes, are ye hurt?' gasped Robin. 'Why the dickens didn't ye *run*, ye fool, when you'd yanked the chain?'

'I dunno.' Dick, his cap gone, his hose torn, and his fair hair all over his dirty face, sat up and stared at the horrible confusion where the bear was dying with ghastly coughing snarls under the pikes of the guards. 'Is the little maid safe? Tom——' He was suddenly and violently sick.

The mayor came bustling and stumbling over the squelching grass, his gown bunched up and his chain hanging down his back.

'Bad boy! Worthless brat!' he scolded his son. 'Why couldn't you keep your place? Your mother's in a swoond and your sister's in hysterics——'

'Now, father——' John Parkyn shouldered his way through the crowd and picked up his young brother—'don't ye rate him now; if it hadn't been for him Tom Elrington and the little lady would both have been mauled for sure.'

'And I'd ha' been mauled but for Robin,' piped Dick weakly—he was feeling mighty limp from his sickness. 'Bowled me over like a cricket ball, he did—just in time.'

'Aye, you're a set o' young heroes, ain't you?' grinned John. 'Sir Edmund's asking for you—though the Lord knows you're in no fit state to be presented to the gentry.'

'Fit or no, let me at least stand on my feet.' Dick wriggled in his brother's arms. 'I'm no babe to be carried, Jack.' He swayed a little and clutched Robin's arm, as John set him down. 'Faith, Robin, we're a pair of ragamuffins,' he said ruefully. 'I've split those fine new shoes you gave me, father.'

True enough, his smart shoes of blue leather, made in the broad-toed fashion set by the burly young king, were split and muddled so as to be scarcely recognizable. They flopped on his feet as he limped across the grass.

Sir Edmund was standing with his little daughter in one arm, and his free hand on Tom's shoulder. He was not speaking, for Lady Isabella, who had recovered from her faint, gave him no chance.

'How can we ever thank him, Edmund? The brave lad—he threw himself between her and that dreadful monster! He might have been clawed to death—'tis Heaven's mercy they are both spared—say something, can't you, Edmund? Thank him—reward him—what can we do for

him? Shall we take him into our household? Why do you stand there mumchance?’

‘My love,’ said Sir Edmund mildly, ‘you have said all for me. Lad—what’s your name?’

Tom straightened to his lanky height.

‘My name is Thomas Elrington,’ he answered, looking the knight directly in the face.

‘Huh!’ Sir Edmund smiled wryly. ‘I thought I knew you. Son to Edward Elrington, the ironmaster, aren’t you? Well—you’ve done me a great service, and you can ask what you will of me, if it’s in my power to give.’

Robin grinned and drove his elbow into Dick’s ribs. He guessed what Tom’s answer would be. He was wrong.

‘Sir,’ said Tom slowly, ‘I do reckon it spoils a deed to ask a guerdon for it. ‘‘Sides, what other could I ha’ done, having the chance? If I have your friendship—that’s enough.’

‘Well spoken. You’re a shrewd lad as well as a bold.’ Sir Edmund’s keen eyes, that knew court as well as countryside, searched Tom’s sallow face.

‘And,’ Tom went on deliberately, ‘I doubt I wouldn’t have succeeded had not someone tweaked Bruin’s chain just at the right moment.’

‘That’s true enough, your worship,’ put in the bearward, who stood in awe of nobody. Bloodstained and muddy, he had followed the mayor and his sons. ‘And here’s the mighty hero what did that tweaking—and the other one what pulled him clear after.’

‘Why! It’s like the old fairy tale,’ exclaimed Lady Isabella. ‘Here stand the three princes who had each a hand in saving the princess.’

Here little Beatrice, who had been very quietly crying off her fright and shock into the fur collar of her father’s coat, lifted her head and looked her three champions over somewhat haughtily.



'They are all very dirty,' quoth she. 'I don't think I want to marry any of them.'

At which everybody laughed, and felt the better for it.

'Well, Master Parkyn,' said Sir Edmund, 'I am sorry for the unlucky end to our sport, but thankful that none—save poor Bruin—has come to a bad end through it. What the good year, man! Don't look so downcast. I'll give the town another bear'—Master Parkyn brightened up considerably—and as for our three heroes, though they may be too valiant proud to ask for aught, I warrant a gold piece each won't come amiss to heal their bruises. Moreover, to my poor best I stand their very good friend, and so they'll find'

'Will you not take a sup of wine at my house, Sir Edmund?' the mayor was beginning, but Lady Isabella cut him short.

'No, no, kind Master Parkyn, I thank you, but we must away home. I'll have my Beatrice into bed—where I warrant your good dame is longing to have your son. What's his name? Richard? And the other's his cousin Robin? Dirt or none, I'll have a kiss of both of them, spite of my dainty Beatrice . . .'

'You 'scaped the kissing, Tom,' teased Robin as the three boys made their way to the mayor's house, guarded from the too curious crowd by the pikemen, who had formed up behind the mayor's party.

'She didn't take to your ugly face,' mocked Dick.

'She reckoned me a man, and too old for kissing,' countered Tom, but absently, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

'I say, Tom'—Robin dropped his voice almost to a whisper—'I thought you'd have asked Sir Edmund's leave for your father to dam Abinger Stream for his hammer.'

'Did you, then? I know better than that. Paid off is done with, and no more to say. As it is, he owes me good-

will, and the end of it will be that my father will get what he wants—or I shall. It makes no odds.'

'Tom, you are a deep one! I'd never have thought all that out,' said Robin admiringly.

'Well, as for me, I'm through with bear-baiting,' Dick remarked viciously. 'Faugh! I've never seen so foul a mess. Let you say what you will, you'll never drag me there again.'

'The grass'll grow all the greener for our cricket, come summer,' laughed Robin. 'Pho! but I'm mucky. Will your mother heat a tub for us, think you?'

'By the way, Robin,' said Dick, 'I didn't see your father on the field. What's come of him?'

'Oh, my guess is that his gouty foot kept him at home. Mother'd make the most of that, for she don't like bear-baiting any more than you do. Lucky for me-- she'd ha' been in a rare taking. I'll ride home this evening, though, and see how things go.'

Tom was very silent, but this was nothing new to his friends. Tom either had a great deal to say or nothing at all. Only, just as they were entering in the house, he made a remark which to Robin and Dick appeared to have no sense to it.

'That little maid has blue eyes.'

## CHAPTER III

### PETER COO

It was not gout, but a visitor, that had kept Master Thomas Polstead at home on the day of the bear-baiting. When Robin rode into the yard of his father's house—Polstead was a substantial yeoman farmer—he found a couple of strange horses in the stable and a long-legged, tow-haired youth lounging in the kitchen.

'Hallo, who's herè?' Robin asked, halting on the threshold. 'Give me a bite, Kate, I'm starving.'

'Oh, get away with you!' Kate, the cook, exclaimed testily. 'Isn't it enough that your uncle Beckingham's arrived on a sudden, and no notice given, but you must come pestering me? And this loon here, taking up all the room, and not doing a hand's turn to help me either. How long since you turned the spit, ye lazy Coo, or whatever your name is?'

The youth called Coo took no notice of Kate, but stared at Robin in a way that he very much disliked, though he could not have said why. Then he grinned, showing yellowish teeth.

'Why, it's one of the three heroes!' he drawled. 'Nay, if I'd known ye were my master's nephew I'd made bold to make acquaintance with you. Peter Coo, at your service—Master Richard Beckingham's eldest 'prentice.'

'Oh,' was all Robin found to say. He helped himself to a pie, judging that it would be some time before supper would be ready; and seeing that Kate was really harassed with work, gave a turn to the spit on which a promising joint was roasting.

'As for me,' went on Coo, 'I don't see why I should act as turnspit to a kitchen wench. I've nearly served my

time, let me tell you, and ready to set up as a master grocer on my own—if your uncle will lend me the money. Which he should, surely, for ain't I like a son to him? Had he but a fair daughter I'd take her to wife, but he having neither chick nor child I'm fain to look elsewhere. Your sister Meg is a comely wench. Shall we be brothers-in-law, young Robin?'

Robin went hot all over. He had detested the fellow Coo the moment he set eyes on him, and every word he uttered made him more hateful.

'I reckon my sister's not for you,' he returned shortly.

'And why should she not be? You dunghill squires are too proud by half. Let me tell you, young cock with your comb not cut yet, we merchants are the men nowadays, with our ships on the high seas bringing spices from the Indies, and our chests of gold in the counting house. It's to us the king looks when he wants money. Trade, trade's the thing!'

'Hark to him!' mocked Kate. 'Calls himself a merchant, and him not through with his 'prenticeship, and never a penny to bless himself with. I reckon Master Beckingham has better things to do with his money than set up a wastrel like you in business. A journeyman to the end of your days you'll be, if you find any master fool enough to employ ye!'

'I have my schemes, woman, I have my schemes!' said Coo darkly. 'It's all in here!' He tapped his low forehead knowingly.

'And as for my sister,' Robin informed him, 'she's promised already to Master John Maynard, mercer of London, so you keep your eyes off her.'

'Never heed him, Robin,' cried Kate. 'I reckon Master Beckingham have brought him down here just to keep an eye on him, lest he be a-stealing of his goods while his master's away. But what was that he said awhile back about three heroes? He sneaked off to the bear-baiting

this afternoon—did aught happen there, or is he lying again?’

‘Oh, naught!’ Robin answered hurriedly. He was really longing to tell Kate, who was a special friend of his, all about the adventure; but he did not feel inclined to talk about it before the jeering Coo. ‘Tell you later,’ he added seeing that Kate looked hurt.

‘Aye,’ Kate nodded understandingly, ‘you should go make your bow to your good uncle. But what ha’ ye been doing to your face? Ye’ve a great blue bruise on the cheek bone.’

‘That ’ll wait!’ Robin grinned. ‘Ask Master Coo here to tell ye—only don’t believe him!’

He gulped down the last of his pie and made for the cosy little parlour where he guessed he would find his family.

The Beckinghams were old friends of the Polsteads. Though they were a Guildford family, Robert, the elder son, had been apprenticed in London to a grocer—that is to say, a merchant who dealt in spices, sugar, and other dainties from the Indies. He had prospered exceedingly, and when he set up in business for himself he sent for his brother Richard to join him. Meanwhile he married a sister of Thomas Polstead, and so it came about that Robert Beckingham stood godfather to their youngest son, our Robin. But some seven years back Robert Beckingham died, and left, among other benefactions in his will, a house and grounds for a school in Guildford—that very schoolhouse over which Brother Geoffrey presided. It was business connected with this will that now brought Richard Beckingham to visit his brother-in-law Polstead.

‘Hallo, my nephew!’ Beckingham greeted Robin cheerily. ‘Thomas, he grows more like you every time I clap eyes on him. Come hither, and tell me all the news. How’s my good friend Brother Geoffrey, your schoolmaster?’

‘Well, please you,’ Robin answered, carefully minding

his manners. He was a bit in awe of his handsome, shrewd-faced uncle in his plum-coloured velvet gown; and he very much hoped he would not be questioned about his progress at school. Master Richard Beckingham was something of a scholar as well as a merchant.

'Robin's a scapegrace. He does your brother's school no credit, I fear,' said his father, stretching sturdy legs to the fire. 'I'm 'prenticing him to my brother Parkyn come New Year.'

'H'm h'm!' grunted Beckingham, who had no great opinion of Mayor Parkyn, but did not choose to say so before Mistress Polstead, his sister. He took Robin and looked him over keenly. 'And how will ye like to be a cloth merchant, nephew?'

'Very well,' mumbled Robin uncomfortably.

'Well, well, and very well! Can't ye say something besides "well"? Wager your tongue runs faster when you're with your schoolmates, eh? Who've you been fighting with to get that bruise on your cheek?'

'Fighting, la!' broke in Mistress Polstead, 'Robin, Robin, have ye been at fisticuffs again?'

'Not this time, mother!' Robin was relieved at the chance to turn the conversation. 'I say, father, it was a pity you didn't bring Uncle Beckingham to the bear-baiting—you'd have seen such a thing as you never saw!'

'Nay, I've no stomach for bear-baiting,' said Beckingham. 'But never tell me you've been trying conclusions with the bear, Robin?'

'Not me, no,' cried Robin. ''Twas Tom and Dick. I nearly missed it, through having to see Brother Geoffrey.' And he tumbled out the story, not in very good order, but clearly enough to electrify his hearers, who all cried out at once, according to their particular interests.

'I never would ha' thought my nephew Dick had it in him!' was Master Polstead's contribution.

'Oh Robin! You might have been killed!' from his sister.

'Spoil your holiday suit, I'll warrant!' cried his mother.

And—'This Tom Elrington now—he's got red blood in him,' decided Beckingham. 'All three of ye showed sense and courage. I'm proud of you, nephew.'

'I say, uncle'—Robin was feeling more at ease now—'what's that lout you have with you—Peter Coo he calls himself? I don't like him.'

'No more do I, Robin, and I don't trust him further than I can see him,' Beckingham agreed. 'Which is why I've brought him with me. I've never actually caught him at knavery, or I'd ha' sent him packing. But just wait till his time's up!'

Robin, to his disgust, had to share his room with his uncle's apprentice, and listen to a long harangue about the cleverness of Peter Coo, how he was the leading spirit among the 'prentices of London, and of his fine plans for the future which would certainly lead him to be Lord Mayor of London. All of which Robin listened to with half an ear, hunched under his blanket and wishing Peter would let him get off to sleep.

From bragging Coo turned to his grievances. There were too many foreigners in London, it seemed, and the pride of them was beyond all bearing. Ruining good English trade they were. Taking the bread out of the mouths of honest Englishmen; shouldering the citizens of London in their own streets. Time they were taught a lesson, and he, Peter Coo, was the one to show them! Flemings and Italians, indeed! Too many of 'em. They were going to get a lesson they wouldn't forget, one of these days!

Robin pulled his blanket over his head. He could still hear Coo's voice droning on as he drifted off to sleep. He wondered dozily if his uncle were going to make a long stay, and if he would have to put up with this every night.

Some time later he found himself suddenly awake. Coo was silent at last, thank goodness—asleep, he supposed. But very quietly asleep. Somehow, Robin had expected he would snore—he *looked* the sort to snore! But Robin could not even hear him breathing — well, that was queer!

The room was quite bright with moonlight, and Robin turned over and blinked at the pallet where Coo had been lying—had been, for certainly he was not there now! Robin sat up and stared. Where had the fellow gone to? Up to some mischief, no doubt; but it was no business of Robin's, after all. His father's money chest was under his big four-post bed, and securely locked at that. There was nothing else of value in the house, and if Coo chose to go snooping round he couldn't lay hands on anything worth while. Anyway, somebody would probably wake up and give him the thrashing he so richly deserved.

All the same, Robin felt uneasy. He lay and listened. There was no sound anywhere to suggest a night prowler. Ought he to go and wake his uncle or his father? Small thanks he'd get—and no doubt Coo had some excuse ready!

At last, unable to lie still, Robin stole to the window, and looked out at the moon-bright fields. The shadow of the house lay black across the courtyard. *Was* that something moving close by the stables? Robin crouched by the low sill, listening and peering.

Yes, it was certainly something. A straying calf, perhaps? That would make more noise. Holly, the sheep dog, nosing after rats? If it was anything else, why didn't Holly bark?

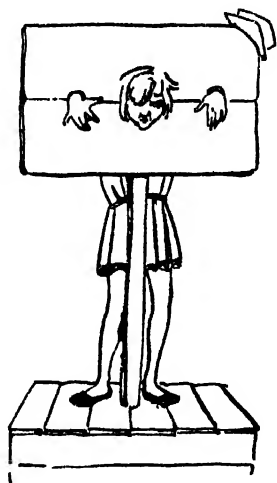
A little way below Robin's window the roof of the kitchen wing sloped steeply to within six feet of the ground. Whatever it was that moved disappeared just under that roof, and now Robin could clearly hear the sound of scrambling. It would be easy enough for a tall fellow—



such as Coo—to climb up on to that sloping roof and so reach the window. No doubt, he had got down that way, too. Robin himself had done it often enough. He drew back, stole across the room, and lay down on his bed.

In a few minutes the light was blocked by a long body, bent double for the scramble through the small opening. How quiet the rascal was—no doubt he had had plenty of practice in stealthy comings and goings! Robin lay quite still, feigning sleep. He definitely did not want to hear Peter Coo's voice again.

He thought he heard a chuckle as the 'prentice slithered to his bed and lay down. In a surprisingly short time he very clearly heard a snore—and the snores went on relentlessly until morning.



THE PILLORY

## CHAPTER IV

### MIDNIGHT ESCAPE

ROBIN had no chance to speak to his uncle or his father next morning. His father was out and about the business of the farm by six o'clock, and his uncle chose to lie abed. Robin himself had to be away early if he were to reach Guildford in time for school—as it was he would be a little late, but surely Brother Geoffrey would overlook it in the circumstances!

He had still not made up his mind whether to say anything about Peter Coo's midnight excursion. On the whole, he thought he would talk it over with Tom and Dick before deciding. So he stuffed some bread and cheese into his wallet, swallowed a draught of small beer, and went out to saddle his pony, Jenny. Holly, the sheep dog, thumped a lazy tail as the boy passed him in the half light, and Robin stood still as a thought struck him. *Holly had not barked!*

He laid a hand on the tousled head, slid it over the dog's nose. Holly snuffled. Was it Robin's fancy, or was his nose really hot and dry?

'Up, Holly! Up, good dog!'

Holly got to his feet and shook himself. He seemed all right, only slower than usual. But then he *was* getting old! Robin shook his head in puzzlement. If only his father had been handy he would have had it all out then and there. As it was, he really couldn't wait. He slung a leg over Jenny's back and cantered out of the yard.

'How is your father? Did he have the gout yesterday?' Dick whispered cautiously the moment Brother Geoffrey was fully engaged with the small boys.

'No, he hadn't—Uncle Beckingham has come—and I've something to tell you,' Robin whispered back.

'Thought you were stuffed full of news, like a capon at Christmas,' muttered Tom. 'What is it?'

'Sh—not now—remember yesterday eve! 'Sides, it's a long story.' Robin applied himself to his work, and Tom, with a sardonic grin at his friend's virtue, did likewise. Dick never needed any urging.

By noon, when they were let out of school, they were too hungry to dally. Dinner was their first true meal of the day, and they made for it like chickens when the farmer's wife appears with a bowl of grain. But afterwards, when the rest of the boys were playing a rough and rule-less football up and down the lane, Robin hooked his arms into those of Tom and Dick, and told them all about the unpleasant Peter Coo. Tom did not take it very seriously.

'Out larking after some maid or other,' was his verdict, 'What's it matter? Leave him be is what I say.'

'But he drugged old Holly.' That rankled in Robin more than any prank Coo might have been up to.

'What odds? The dog's all right, ain't he? Even if the fellow is a lout, I don't see that it's any business of yours.'

'I'm not so sure,' said Dick thoughtfully. 'He might be after some ill games. I'd tell Master Beckingham, if I were you.'

'What ill games, beyond an idle prank or two, could he be up to?' Tom demanded. 'He knows no one in these parts.'

'That's very true,' Dick agreed. 'And, after all, tale-bearing is hateful. Forget him, Robin.'

Robin felt that his story had not gone down particularly well.

'All the same,' he said a bit resentfully, '*you* don't have to listen to his eternal bragging—and look at that tow-haired, thin, squinting, hatchet-face of his!'

'Poor Robin!' Dick squeezed his arm sympathetically. 'Sleep with us to-night.'

'I can't,' Robin was beginning. 'Father always expects me home when uncle Beckingham's there——'

But Tom suddenly interrupted.

'Squinting, say you? Hatchet-faced? Tow-haired? Tell us again what like is this Peter Coo.'

'Almost a man—say seventeen. Gangling—his knees at odds which shall pass the other first. Speaks in a high whining voice——'

'Eh!' cried Tom. 'Remember that ugly lout at the bear pit yesterday, who threw ill jests at me and my father?'

'I barely saw him,' Robin scowled in an effort to remember.

'You, Dick? But there, you never take note of anything but your crabbed Latin.'

'I didn't heed him. But what odds? It's only Robin can tell if it was the same.'

'If it wasn't Coo,' Robin said slowly, 'it was mighty like him. But, Tom, it couldn't ha' been! How should Peter Coo, just come from London with my uncle Beckingham, know aught about your folk at Shere?'

'And that's just it!' Tom declared. 'See you, if Coo have got all that knowledge, he's got acquaintance in Guildford; or else he's made 'em pretty quick—a snooping, meddling, ill-conditioned knave!'

'Why, here's a coil!' Dick laughed. 'You took no heed of him yesterday—why so hot to-day?'

'If he had been just a clod from the back lanes of Guildford town, why should I care? But if a stranger shows he knows too much, why, he's been asking questions! And what for? That's what I'd like to know. Robin, we must uncover this!'

'What do you think he's after?' Robin was gleeful at having roused scornful Tom's interest at last.

'Ha'n't the leastest notion.' Tom always went broad Surrey whenever he was kindled. 'But I'm bound to smell 'un out someways. Lemme think.'

'Shall we tell my father?' Dick asked, but doubtfully.

'Don't you tell Mus' Parkyn nothing. This pie 's my own—leastways 'tis Robin's and mine, since he 's fleered at my father and jeered at Robin——'

'It 's mine too, if you are in,' cried Dick eagerly. What do we do?'

Tom stood stock-still, unhooked his arms from the others, folded them across his chest, dropped his head, and scowled furiously. Dick and Robin stood in respectful silence. When Tom was in these moods they always let him have the lead. But Robin softly drove his elbow into Dick's ribs and chuckled!

'To-night,' Tom said at last, 'you, Robin, must feign sleep until Coo goes——'

'Chance he won't go!' put in Robin.

'Then I 'll have a cold wait, that 's all, for I 'll be lurking behind your father's south barn, where I can see your window, and if he leaves I can't miss him.'

'You can't get out of our attic window 'thout my father hears you—he sleeps below, as you know very well,' objected Dick.

'Oh, Robin 'll bid me back with him to - night—won't you, Robin? To make acquaintance with Mus' Beckingham.'

'My father 'd think it odd,' Robin began doubtfully.

'Ass! Did I say I 'd come in? I want a tale for good Mus' Parkyn, that 's all.'

'We 'll be tired and hungry.'

'What care I? Won't be the first time I 've gone supperless for sport's sake. Now, Robin, when Coo 's well away, you follow. I 'll give a fox's bark to show which way we 've gone, lest you lose sight of him, as well you might.'

'And where do I come into it?' cried Dick. 'Couldn't Robin ask us both home? 'Twould look more natural like.'

'No,' said Tom firmly. 'You 'd be overtired waiting supperless and cold in the night. You know it.'

'True, Dick.' Robin spoke regretfully. 'You wouldn't stand it, all bruised as you are from yesterday, too. We'll tell you all about it in the morning.'

'Oh,' said Dick disappointedly, 'but I want to be in this! My shoulder doesn't ache now—much——'

'You'd catch a rheum in your head, and a churchyard cough. Dick, dear, ye can't do it. I'm sorry.'

'Oh, well,' said Dick airily. 'I don't know that I care, after all. What particular jest is there in catching a silly knave kissing a girl or robbing a hen's nest? For what else can he be after, when all 's said?'

'That 's very likely,' Tom agreed. 'All I want 's to catch him and make him look a fool. I've a crow to pluck with him, and so has Robin, but you've none, so why worry?'

'I'll be snug in bed thinking o' you two on a fool's errand,' Dick chuckled. 'There'll be a frost to-night!'

Robin looked at him suspiciously. Dick seemed to have given in just a little too readily! But his friend looked him in the face with such an angelic smile that Robin felt ashamed of his suspicions. Dick really was too good for this wicked world!

It is to be feared that none of the three paid as much attention to their studies that afternoon as they should have done. Even Dick got a stern reproof for inattention, while Tom and Robin got a dozen strokes of the birch apiece for sheer bad work. Robin thought Brother Geoffrey looked at him reproachfully, and his heart smote him. But with such a jolly adventure in the offing, how could he possibly fix his mind on grammar?

Dick was apologetic. 'Sir, I am sorry, my mind was elsewhere. I have a great matter to think on this night.'

Tom and Robin stole a horrified glance at each other. What was Dick going to say? Was his revenge for being left out to be the uncovering of their plans? But Dick went on.

'I have lately lighted on a book, sir, that troubles me. I cannot well make it out . . .'

'What is it, my son?' Anything to do with books made Brother Geoffrey benevolent, and the boys breathed again.

'It is some writings of one Erasmus, sir, a Dutchman. He writes very wittily, but he puzzles me with his sayings about Holy Church. 'Tis called *In Praise of Folly*, sir.'

'Erasmus! He's no meat for babes. But, seeing you have begun to read, you had best bring me your questions. Such things breed maggots in the brain if they be not explained. How did you come by it?'

'A traveller, sir, left it at the "Red Lion." Please, sir, may I bring it you to-night? I can't sleep for thinking on it.'

The others heaved a sigh of relief. How like Dick to get excited over a musty old book! Well, he would forget his disappointment in a cosy, learned discussion with Brother Geoffrey, and they could have their fun with a clear conscience.

So after school Tom and Robin presented themselves before Mayor Parkyn to ask his leave for Tom to spend the night at Master Polstead's. Dick had been asked too, Robin added, but his bruises pained him, and he did not feel equal to the short ride (they thought it would sound more probable, put like that!). Master Parkyn unsuspectingly gave his permission, and charged Robin to ask Master Beckingham to favour him with his company to dinner the following day.

Tom begged Gill for some food to keep them going—for, he pleaded, it was a long time before they would get their supper. He got half a crusty loaf for each of them, and a generous slab of meat pie—all of which he appropriated.

'For,' he said with a grin as he and Robin rode off, 'it's all I'll get for supper while you are stuffing yourself.'

Robin pretended to be unaccountably sleepy that evening, and contrived to be well under his blankets before Peter climbed the narrow stair. The reason for this was

that he had omitted to take off his breeches! Not that his uncle's apprentice would be likely to notice—Robin's nose wrinkled as he recalled his companion's disgusting London fashion of huddling into bed fully dressed—but it was just possible that he might wonder why Robin slept in his shirt one night and his breeches the next.

Coo was not talkative that night. To be sure, Robin was snoring rather pointedly, but very likely that wouldn't have stopped him. He scrambled into bed without delay, and soon a duet of snores rose musically on the air. Robin nearly choked himself with suppressed chuckles when it dawned on him that each of them wide awake, was snoring to deceive the other.

It seemed to Robin that the contest went on for a very long time, and in fact his thoughts were beginning to waver into a dream of chasing a bear which was Peter over the roof tops of Guildford town, when he suddenly realized that the snoring had stopped. His eyes snapped open in the dark—only just in time. The small square of the window was blocked.

With a great effort Robin lay quite still, while Peter wriggled his long frame feet foremost out of the window. Now only his head and shoulders showed, then two bumps where his hands gripped the sill. There was a faint scuffling sound as his feet felt for a hold on the roof below. Then the window showed clear.

Robin was up in a flash, pulling on an old doublet, for a nip in the air warned him that the night was chill. Cautiously he peered out of the window as he buttoned his coat, and had the satisfaction of seeing a lean shadow melt into the darker shade of the barn. Just a moment to let him get out of sight of the house: once beyond the barn Tom would pick him up. Now!

It was more of a drop for Robin than for Peter, but he knew every inch of the way, and was as much at home as a cat hunting sparrows. His feet made no noise on the



thatch—at least, no more noise than would be put down to the rats which squeaked indignantly at thus being twice disturbed. He was across the yard and at the corner of the barn in a flash. From a clump of trees a fox barked. That would be Tom. A minute more, and the boys were together.

'Gone down the lane riverwards,' Tom whispered. 'Come on!'

They slid away through the patchy moonlight, their quarry for the most part in sight, though sometimes fading into the deceitful greys and blacks of bank and copse. The November bareness made tracking easier than it would have been in summer. Besides, Peter, who did not know the district well, went slowly and stopped every now and then to quest about nervously, as if he were afraid of missing his way. Once they came so close to him that they could hear a faint clattering noise.

'Ladykins! It's his teeth a-chattering!' giggled Tom. 'The fellow's scared almost to tears!'

'I do believe he's about to turn back,' Robin whispered disgustedly. 'No—he holds on. What ever can it be that draws him so?'

They skirted the north ditch of the town, going steeply down hill, and presently the high wall of the Priory loomed above them.

'Is he going to confess his sins to the Prior?' Robin snickered.

'Tch!' Tom hushed him impatiently. 'He's making for the river as I live! Hoo—*look!*'

In the shadow of an osier thicket by the river bank something moved, and with a gasp of relief that the boys could plainly hear Coo hurled himself forward to join it. They caught a mutter of talk.

'Now, this *was* worth a night's sleep!' Tom muttered joyfully. 'Mischief—mischief afoot, as I live! And we here to spy on it!' He hugged himself and sketched a noiseless, gleeful dance.

'Ought we to call the watch?' Robin didn't want to do anything of the sort, but in spite of his pranks he had the makings of a conscientious citizen.

'Ass! By the time we 'd waked old Roger, we 'd ha' lost them. They 're moving! Come!'

Along the path by the river—past the bear pit, empty now; by the great gates of the Priory; up to where the bridge humped itself, unguarded since the strong hand of the Tudor kings had brought peace to England. As the two men stepped out on it, the boys could see that Peter's companion was short and broad and wrapped in a dark cloak.

'Marry send they don't look back, for there's little cover here,' breathed Robin.

'Bend double and keep on the shadow ~~side~~!' hissed Tom.

Halfway across Robin checked, and Tom, just behind, nearly fell over him.

'What a plague——?' he growled low and angry.

'Tch! Something's following us.'

Tom cocked an ear. 'Hear naught.'

'Nothing now. But something touched the bridge wall—ye know how sound travels along a thing that's solid?'

'Well, nothing's moving now. Maybe it was a straying dog—or donkey.'

'Whatever it was, we must see this out.' Robin resumed his crouching progress and Tom followed.

Beyond the bridge on the left stood St. Nicholas's church amid a huddle of dilapidated cottages, above the green strip called the Millmead. The road to the south and the sea swerved off here, while the Farnham road climbed steeply up the mount and disappeared into a belt of black trees. If the dwellers in the cottages heard footsteps passing their door, they knew better than to come out to look. No one honest, they considered, stirred after midnight—and for the most part they were quite right.

Tom squatted in the shadow of the churchyard wall,

pulling Robin down beside him. From somewhere before them in that jittery darkness came a jumbled stir of sound, faint stampings and breathings, the squeak of leather and squelch of feet on mud and leaves, that spoke of men and horses. Peter Coo and his companion showed clear in the moonlight for a moment, and then were swallowed up.

'Well, well, well, who 'd ha' thought it of our Peter? He 's lost no time, I must say. Now, what had we best do?'

'But what is it?' Robin asked, puzzled.

'Owlers, ye dolt!'

'Whew!' Robin let out the ghost of a whistle. 'Wool, I suppose, for the Low Countries, and yon 's their pack train.'

'Robbing the King's Majesty of his due and lawful taxes!' whispered Tom in righteous wrath.

'And honest English clothiers of their profits,' added Robin, the clothier's nephew; and both boys laughed. They did not care two pins for anything but the adventure.

'Ha! They run them down by way o' Winchester, I 've heard tell; or else by water down to Chichester—the creeks at Wittering are full o' queer craft. I 'd more than a mind to join 'em once, after my father had thrashed me.'

'Well, what do we do?' Robin muttered. 'We can't take 'em by ourselves, and time we 've given information they 'll be off.'

'What our Peter 's doing here is what puzzles me,' Tom confessed. 'Why should *he*, a Londoner, have dealings with owlers in Surrey? Bide a bit, Robin, and see how it 'll fadge.'

Just then someone touched him on the shoulder.

## CHAPTER V

### THE OWLERS

It says a good deal for Tom's self-control that he did not yelp at that unexpected hand, but merely gave so violent a start that he knocked Robin flat.

'It's only me,' said a mild voice.

'*Dickon!*' Robin wriggled from under Tom. 'Imp! Rascal! How did *you* come here?'

'Giving us a scare like that!' Tom grumbled.

'Thought you were nicely rid of me, didn't you?' Dick chuckled. 'Lay in wait for you, I did, after I'd finished with Brother Geoffrey. He's safe to talk for hours, if you once get him on a book! I picked you up by North Ditch and followed you here. Now what's to do?'

Robin explained briefly, while Tom kept his eyes on the black wood so as to miss nothing. He had scarcely finished when a line of dark figures began to emerge from the shadow, moving to the left and coming down on to the miry road beyond the cottages.

'They've left the nags tethered,' whispered Tom. '*Now* I understand!'

'What?' asked Dick, who was still confused about it all.

'They bribed Peter Coo to watch by the ponies, of course. Being a foreigner he couldn't tell on them if he were caught, don't ye sec? I'll lay *he* doesn't know where they're going or what they're after, the poor fool.'

'And what do we do now?' Dick shivered a little in the cold air. 'Get my father to turn out the town guard?'

'You can if you like,' said Tom, 'though it's odds you'll catch none of the owlers. They're off to pick up the bales someone has hidden for them, and we don't know where.'

'We might catch them coming back to their ponies,' suggested Dick.

Tom spat contemptuously. 'Think those blunder-footed pikemen of yours wouldn't give the alarm and send every man jack of the rogues scattering in the woods?'

'True. Very true,' Dick agreed ruefully. 'I 'd like to know, too, where they 've the stuff hidden, and who 's in league with them.'

'We 'll never know *that*. Our concern is with Master Peter Coo—he 's our quarry.'

Robin wriggled excitedly. 'Tom, he 's but a gangling lout, tall though he be. If you and me could but reach yon wood unbeknown to him——'

'Aye, for sure—if only they 've not left another to keep guard with him. We 'll soon make sure.' He began to wriggle forward, an inch at a time.

'Dick, you stay here,' Robin commanded. 'You 've not got weight enough for this.'

'Very good, Robin,' Dick agreed meekly—much too meekly, as Robin ought to have known after the night's experience, but he was too intent on the adventure ahead to think about it.

There was an awkward patch to cross, clear in the moonlight, before the boys could gain the shelter of the bushes and brambles on either side of the road; but they had to trust that Coo's London-trained eyes would not be alert for anything crawling so low along the ground. If he saw them, it was to be hoped he would think it was some beast of the night on the prowl. Apparently he took no alarm, for there was no other sound than the fidgeting of the tethered ponies.

Both boys gave a small gasp of relief when they found themselves among the thickets, and were able to stand up in a friendly shade and stretch their cramped limbs. The long black mass of the trees, rising up the hill, covered the rest of the distance, and all that was needed was silence. Cautiously they slithered forward until they could just make out the dark shapes of the ponies.

'There he is!' Tom pointed, and Robin, peering and blinking, managed to pick out a long shadow with a pale oval atop of it. 'Get behind him. I'll leap on his back, and you grab at his legs.'

'Hark at him!' Robin's whisper was shaken with laughter. 'He's scared—listen to him muttering!'

'Pater noster—ave Maria—ora pro nobis—benedicite—mea culpa!' Peter was gabbling under his breath all the tags of Latin prayers he had picked up in a not very religious life. The boys were near enough now to see the roll of his eyes.

'He's wishing himself safe home in his bed under your uncle's counter. He'll wish it more in a minute. A little closer—now!'

Tom leapt at Peter's shoulders, Robin launched himself at the 'prentice's long legs, in the way he had learned when he and his mates played ragged football up and down the back alleys of Guildford. Peter let out a yell, but it was choked off by Tom's hand over his mouth, while the other arm cut off the breath in his throat. At the same time his legs were yanked from under him, and all three came to the ground in a tangled heap. The ponies pranced, straining at their halters, and whickered frenziedly. They would have neighed aloud if their jaws had not been strapped.

Peter Coo put up no fight at all. He lay quite still while Tom knelt on his back, and only a muffled blubbling (his mouth was full of leaves and twigs) showed that he was conscious.

'Get a rope,' Tom commanded, 'and tie his feet.'

Robin groped among the ponies, found what he wanted, and knotted Peter's bony ankles together.

'Now his hands.' Tom got off his victim's back and pulled the sprawled arms together.

'What's he saying?' asked Robin, busy with the knots.

Peter had lifted his head from the ground and was sputtering.

'Ora pro nobis—mercy on me, masters—I'm a poor man—ave Maria! I was forced to it, on my honour I was. They threatened me. Not guilty, your worship. I am innocent, your honour. I'll tell you all I know, so help me, 'twasn't my fault, you'll catch the rogues if you go after 'em, let me up, and I'll show you which way they went——'

'Tcha!' snorted Robin. 'His liver's white, Tom. The squealing rat!'

'Don't know which was the bigger fool,' Tom grunted, 'those owlers for trusting him, or him for letting himself be diddled by 'em. Well, our job's neatly done. Just loosen the ropes on his legs, Robin, so 's he can walk hobbled.'

'One minute.' Robin was busy untying the ponies from their trees. 'There's a half dozen nice little nags here—pity to lose them, we'll ride one apiece and lead the others.'

'Thrifty Robin!' Tom chuckled. 'Make haste, though. We don't want the owlers back afore we're away.'

He loosened the ropes on Peter's legs and hoisted him, not too gently, to his feet. Peter stared wildly as it dawned on him that he had been captured ignominiously by two mere boys.

'Whoo!' he whistled, then gave a great gulp and was silent. When he spoke again his tone had changed.

'A joke's a joke,' he whispered, 'but this has gone far enough. I warn ye, you're meddling in what don't concern you. You don't know it, but you're in mortal danger, my young masters. You turn me loose afore them comes as'll think no more o' slitting your weasands than o' wringing a duck's neck. Mind, I'm telling you! You don't know what you're mixed up in.'

'Don't we?' said Robin briefly, astride one of the ponies and gathering the halters of two others in his hand. 'Here's one for you, Tom.'

'You let me go, and I'll give you freely what's in my pocket——'

'What 's in your pocket is no good to us, but it 's enough to hang you, I don't doubt,' was Tom's consolation, as he threw his leg across a pony's back. 'Robin, there 's one bit of truth in all he says, and that is that the sooner we 're out of here the better. Let 's go.'

'No, no, no!' shrieked Peter, throwing himself on his knees. 'Let me go! I 'll not be hanged! Let me go! I 'm not fit to die! Beseech you, young masters! Would you take a poor fellow's life for one slip?'

'Will he be hanged, do you think?' asked Robin.

'Why, I suppose so,' Tom answered carelessly. 'If a man be hanged for the stealing of a sheep, why not for the stealing of a pack of sheep's fleeces? And a good riddance, say I.'

'Somehow it goes against me,' mumbled Robin half to himself.

'It 's the law,' said Tom. 'A harsh law, maybe. But there 'tis. Come away now, we 've been here long enough. Stop screeching, you, and step out, and maybe Master Beckingham 'll put in a word for you, that you 'scape with a whipping at the cart's tail.'

They rode down the hill in cavalcade, Peter Coe stumbling at Tom's side, the other end of the rope that bound his hands knotted to a pony's halter.

'Now, I suppose, we 'd best go straight to the mayor,' Robin cogitated. 'Wish we could ha' got those owlers with their stolen goods, though. 'Twould ha' rounded off the night nicely.'

'Hey!' Tom exclaimed. 'Where 's Dickon got to? It was just here we left him.'

'Blike he went off to call the guard—though that 's not like him, to act without sseeing what came of us.'

'If he had,' said Tom, 'there 'd be some stir in the town by now. But all 's quiet.'

'I 'll swear I know what he 's done, cried Robin. 'He 's followed the owlers!'



'If he has,' Tom looked grim, 'he 's landed himself in a coil that 's too much for him. Aye, wouldn't that be just like our Dickon, never to think whether he can bring a thing to a good end or not?'

'His heart is too big for his body,' agreed Robin ruefully, 'and I should ha' remembered it when he answered me so lamb-like. Tom, we 'll have to go after him.'

'And land us in a coil too?' What can we do against a dozen or so sturdy rogues?' said long-headed Tom. 'No, Robin, we can't master this single-handed. We 'll have to get help.'

'You go then,' declared Robin, and letting go of his led ponies—which promptly put their noses down to the grass—he wheeled his mount to the south by the river bank.

'Where are you off to?' Tom demanded.

'To follow, of course, and find where they 've gone if I can,' Robin said sharply. 'Who knows what may have happened by the time you 've roused the mayor and got the guard turned out? It 's a poor chance, but the only one, of saving our Dickon from a cut throat or a knife in the ribs.' He kicked his pony smartly in the ribs and cantered off.

'Well!' Tom stared after him. Among the three of them it was usually he who took the lead, but every now and then Dick was liable to play a lone hand, as he had this night, or Robin to jump to some decision and be off before one could argue with him. Well, help would certainly be needed before this adventure were through, and it was up to him, Tom, to attend to it.

He had forgotten Coo for the moment. Now he was all at once aware that the rope which tied his prisoner to the pony was hanging loose, and Coo was nowhere to be seen. He must have wriggled his hand free of that hastily knotted rope, and——

'Oh, tarnation!' growled Tom furiously. 'I'll teach young Robin how to tie ropes when next I see him!'

Meanwhile there was no time to hunt for the fugitive. Tom left all but the ponies he was leading—he would need them for the evidence if his tale were to be believed—and clattered over the bridge and up the cobbled High Street.

Robin meanwhile rode as hard as he dared, considering the badly rutted road and the uncertain light, and as he rode the dismal conviction grew on him that he was on a hopeless errand. He had no idea how long the affair in the wood had taken, and Dick and the owlers must have had a good start. He had not the faintest idea to what hidden lair they were bound. They might have turned off anywhere into the wooded hills on the west. East, however, lay the river, and here there was no ford nearer than St. Catherine's Mount. Would they be likely to cross the river? Or suppose whatever they were bound to fetch were being brought upstream by boat?

'But if that's so'—Robin's thoughts jogged up and down to his riding—'at least I shall meet up with them. Steady there!' He pulled the pony to a walk and prered carefully about him.

From the road the ground sloped steeply away to the marshy river meadows. Beyond the river, the houses climbing the hill stood sharply out, white and black, and the mill dam shone dully like a steel mirror. The winding river Wey coiled serpentwise between the tall dead sedges of its autumn banks. Was that black spot a moving boat below him? He had come to the place where a little path plunged steeply down to river level. There was a small wharf there, where in summer a ferry boat sometimes carried the country folk across. But at this time of year few people cared to splash through the bog, and the boat was commonly laid up high and dry. Whoever used the river way to-night was on no ordinary business.

Robin urged his sure-footed pony down the path. They ended up with a slither in the mud, at the river's verge, the little beast almost on its haunches, and Robin close to

sliding off at its tail. He threw out a hand to save himself from a sideways spill, caught hold of something that was not grass, and as the pony recovered its balance and staggered to its feet he found himself clutching a muddy flat cap with a broken feather. A cap he recognized. Dick's!

Dick's cap—but where was Dick? On the other side of the river, close under the bank, was something which might be the boat he had seen, and across the water-meadows, all blurry with lowlying mist, something seemed to be moving. Without a minute's hesitation Robin put the pony to the water. It was a gallant little animal, evidently well trained by its masters to go anywhere, and a river or so was all in the night's work. In it went without balking, swimming strongly across the current (luckily the Wey runs lazily through the meads), with Robin wet to the waist clinging to its mane. Ugh! but the water was cold!

It was a bit of a struggle to scramble up the bank on the far side. They had been carried a few yards down stream and a bend in the bank hid the boat from Robin. He did not stay to investigate—time for that later. The chief thing was to gain on whoever was ahead of him! Splash, squelch, flob, flob, over the meadows and up to the firmer shelf of the Shalford road. Now, which way?

Southward, so far as he could tell, there was nothing. But towards Guildford a small figure—unless his eyes deceived him—was limping wearily. Robin put the pony to a canter again.

'Dickon, Dickon, ye little villain. What possessed ye?'

'Oh, Robin, I'm glad to see you! I'd never ha' come up with them. Let me up!'

Robin hauled him up behind him.

'Get on! Get on!' urged Dick. 'Rack's Close!

'Rack's Close, ye mooncalf! Are ye out o' your head?'

'Get on!' Dick repeated. 'No time—'splain later.'

'Oh, very well.' Robin kicked the faithful pony to a

canter. Rack's Close, where the iron stretching-frames stood empty, now that summer was past, was only a little further on. It ended above in an abrupt chalk cliff all overgrown with bramble, ivy, and scrubby trees. Warned by Dick's hand on his arm, Robin pulled up the pony and hitched it to a bush. The two boys stole forward on foot. The racks, like gigantic clothes-horses, stood gaunt. Dick took the lead as they cautiously climbed the slope towards the cliff. Like a beagle he quested here and there, until suddenly he stopped and laid his head close to the chalky wall.

'Listen!' he breathed.

From inside the cliff came the sound of heavy steps and hoarse voices.



A TUDOR DANDY

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SECRET OF THE CAVES

DICK put out a hand and pulled aside a tangle of bushes. Robin, craning breathlessly forward, could just make out a low arch, partly blocked by fallen rubble, leading into a dark tunnel across the end of which fell a gleam of yellow light.

'The caves under Castle Hill,' Dick explained with much satisfaction. '*Just* the place for owlers!'

Robin was bursting with questions, but there was no time for them now.

'What do we *do*?' He cudgelled his brains. 'If they find us here, young Dickon, we're dead men. Think—think! You've done grandly this night—can't your brains find us a way to bring the rogues to book at the end of it?'

But, as so often happened, Dick's inspiration having carried him so far failed him at the supreme point.

'Go home and tell my father,' was all he could suggest.

'And have them get away? *Wait*—I have it! Dick—by now Tom should ha' told his tale. The town guard 'll be mustering. Go on, hot-foot, and tell 'em to come down to the river where we crossed—how *did* you cross, by the way?'

'By the ferryman's skiff—*they* had a boat waiting.'

'Good! They won't find it, if I have any luck. Go now, take the nag.'

So while Dick, clinging fast by the pony's mane, for he was no great horseman, cantered towards the town, Robin legged it for the water meadows as fast as his clinging, soaking clothes would let him. He had to hunt along the bank for the place where the owlers' boat was moored—a heavy, flat-bottomed affair—and then there were several

desperate minutes while he strove with numb, chilled fingers to unfasten the rope that moored her to a willow stump. It took time, too, to push her off from the bank and into the main current, but at last he stood panting and breathless, watching her drift slowly, drunkenly, but gradually gaining speed, towards the mill dam.

By this time splashings and curses warned him that the owlers had finished their task in the caves and were plodding towards him across the meadow. Where was that skiff Dick had crossed in? Good, there it was. In sprang Robin, to realize with a gasp of horror that the oars were missing! He guessed well enough what had happened. Dick, in the heat of the chase and always careless in practical matters, had flung them down when he landed so that they fell outside the boat and drifted away. Now the steps were very near. There was only time to leap from the skiff into a bed of rushes and lie there, half in the water, pricked by nettle and thistle and unbearably tickled by dead grasses.

'What was that?' came a low, startled voice.

'An otter, ye fool. Where did ye moor the boat?'

'To yon willow, o' course. You saw me.'

'Then ye didn't make her fast, for she's gone.'

'I'll swear I made her fast. Blind as a worm, ye are. Nay!' A rumble of oaths. 'She've gone for true!'

'What? How? Where?' Crowding feet and furious, low-toned swearing above Robin's head as he lay pressed into the mud, his heart thumping and his throat cold with fear. Oh, oh, oh, would Dick fetch the guards in time? Would he make them understand? 'Mary, Mary, ora pro nobis!'

'Was that an otter that we heard?'

'Search! Search!'

'Nay—best get off. Who knows who's been here? Make for Shalford and so round——'

'Nay—the ford above St. Catherine's——'

They were all clamouring against one another, angry, frightened, ready to fall out with one another and filled with suspicion. Robin, sick with cold and fright, felt now that he didn't care whether they were caught or not if only they would go away.

Then someone's foot slipped on the muddy bank and came down on Robin's thigh. He yelped—he couldn't help it—with the sudden pain. Another minute, and he was hauled into the midst of a crowd of threatening shadows of men, shaken, cuffed, his arms gripped in strong hands till he thought the bones would break.

'Where be our boat? Was it you loosed un? Answer, you young varmint, or 'twill be the worse for ye!'

Robin hung limp in their hands.

'Stunned, belike, the little rat. You handled un too rough, Hob. 'On't get naught out o' he.'

'T's only a boy's devilry.'

'He 've lost us our boat. Pitch un in the river!'

'He's shammin'. Make un answer!'

Robin's wits were working furiously. Was that the tramp of heavy feet coming faintly from the Shalford Road? He decided to burst into tears.

'Didn't mean no harm!' he blubbered. 'Was a-setting of night lines . . . didn't know you was a-using of your boat—thought I'd cross to t'other side in her and while I was a-shoving her off she drifted aw-a-ay!'

The last word was on a rising howl that carried clearly across the meadows, but it won for him a clout on the jaw that brought the tears in good earnest.

'Will you stow your gab! Pitch the little varmint into the river, I say, and let's away. We've lost half the night as 'tis. Who knows that young ass of a Londoner won't have given the show away?'

Yes, it was certainly feet on the road behind. Horses, too! Guildford men for ever! Robin lifted up his voice and wailed again.

'No, no, no, *don't* drown I! Do-o-n't! Ow! Ow-ow-ow!'

'Tch! Hark! Drop him and run! Run for your lives!'

But they hadn't a chance against the riders who, guided by Robin's screams, came plunging across the meadows, followed, heavy-footed and panting, but staunch, by the town guards. One by one the owlers were rounded up, and their packs collected from where they had dropped them. Meanwhile Tom had flung himself from his pony and gathered Robin into his arms.

'Robin, oh, Robin lad! Have they hurt you?'

'I think my jaw 's broke,' Robin mumbled, feeling at it tenderly. '*And* my thigh where that brute jumped on it!'

'And you're soaked to the skin and that caked with mud your mother wouldn't know ye! What have you been a-doing, Robin?'

'Tis the second suit I've spoiled in two days,' Robin giggled feebly. 'What a night, Tom! Did Dick find you?'

'Aye, Dick came galloping in, laid all along the pony's neck, just as Master Mayor had contrived to muster the town guard. He was quicker than I'd thought for, because——'

Robin found himself all at once swept up into a pair of strong arms.

'Playing the hero again, or is it the villain?' said the voice of Richard Beckingham. 'Nephew, nephew, you've given us all a sad turn! Your mother's in hysterics—or was when I left her. When she found your bed empty——'

'Why, what took her up there in the middle of the night?' Robin forgot his bruises in surprise.

'Seems she'd taken a shuddering at that rogue 'prentice of mine, Peter Coe, and had a dream that he had murdered you. So what must she do when she wakes up but climb the stairs to make sure you were safe. And finding you



flown, wakes all the house with screaming. When searching couldn't discover you, nothing would please her but that I must to Guildford town to get her good brother the mayor's advice. And indeed, nephew, you've led us a sorry dance, and it's to be hoped you'll be able to tell us what it's all about.'

'Tom will tell the story,' sighed Robin shamelessly. 'My jaw's broke, and my thigh's broke, my elbow's out of joint, I'm all one bruise, and I'm wet to the bones. I can tell naught.' He dropped his head on his uncle's shoulder.

'For so sorely wounded a warrior you have an astonishing gift of tongues,' said Master Beckingham dryly. 'But truly this is not the place to knit up the skein. I think you've done the town a service this night, the three of you, however badly ye set out. So let's get home.'

It was not until next day that the three boys had a chance of putting together the several pieces of their adventures. Robin had been stripped, dried, warmed, and put to bed with a hot posset, and when Tom and Dick rolled in beside him they all slept like logs until far into the morning. When he woke, Robin was desperately stiff, but the apothecary could find no broken bones. However, he was glad enough to stay in bed. Both he and Tom wanted more than anything else to know, first, how Dick knew anything about the caves, and next, why he had not shared with them a secret so full of possibilities.

'I found 'em—oh, years ago,' Dick answered vaguely. 'When I was a little chap, watching the weavers stretching their cloths on the racks, I went scrambling among the bushes, and by good chance stumbled on the entrance. 'Twas a good place to play in, and I told no one, lest mother forbid me. You know what women are!'

'But why, why, why didn't you tell us?' howled Tom.

'Because I forgot it when I grew up!' Dick opened his eyes very wide. 'We had other things to think of besides

caves. Well then—one day when I was talking with Brother Geoffrey, he was telling me of old days when the castle was a royal dwelling and kings stayed there, instead of at the King's House in the park. And he said how wine was ordered for them by the tun and stored in quarries under Castle Hill. He told how they got the hard chalk from the quarries that built the castle and St. Mary's church, and how many of the churches round were built of that same chalk—as far out as Compton. Proper hard chalk it is, not like the crumbly stuff atop.'

'Oh, ha' done with your chalk and your churches,' grumbled Robin. 'Didn't you remember *then*?'

'Brother Geoffrey said the caverns weren't used now, and men had forgotten where the entrance lay. And I swear to you it wasn't until I saw the owlers crossing the stream and making for the Shalford road that the two things came together in my mind and I saw that my cave opening was the way into the quarries, and that was where the owlers hid their stuff. And I was right, wasn't I?' he finished triumphantly.

'Well, Dick, you do beat all.' Tom laughed. 'However, you did valiantly—you and Robin both.'

'So did you, Tom,' said Dick loyally.

'Me?' Tom made a comical face. 'Nay, I made an ass o' myself at the finish, when all 's said. What did I do but let that sneaking rascal, Peter Coo, give me the slip.' He explained.

'Well, it was my fault for not tying the knots better,' Robin comforted him. 'I don't know that I'm sorry, either. He was a poor wretched fool.'

'Reckon, we're well rid of him,' agreed Dick.

'I wonder, *are* we rid of him?' Tom pondered. 'I've a notion that there's more to Peter Coo than might appear, and that his memory is longer than—Dick's, for instance.'

## CHAPTER VII

### TOM GOES HOME

DICK, of course, caught a cold from his night's adventure, and for two or three days huddled, heavy-eyed, over the fire. Robin, though bruised and sore, was really very little worse for his ducking and battering; but the weather had turned vile, and there was no sport to be had out of doors, so he was glad enough to catch at the excuse of his hurts and stay in the warm, feathering arrows while Dick read aloud from the *Morte d'Arthur*.

But Tom, though he had wrenched his shoulder quite severely in his tussle with Coo, was not to be kept from school by wounds or weather. Brother Geoffrey, in spite of his regrettable fondness for Latin, was a first-class teacher in writing, and Tom wanted to master a clear, clerkly hand in order to keep his father's books well.

'These days,' he said, hitching his cloak well up round his neck, 'a man has to be more than a master of his craft if he's to be upsides with all the dickering and chaffering of your merchants. He's got to understand the ways of trade, and be able to set down his accounts in a fair hand—which my father could never do, the old leather-fist. So I'm wastin' no time.' And he went out, head down, into the gale.

Dick and Robin, curled up on the great oak settle, were quite content to let education go hang for the present. Dick, heavy with his cold, presently dozed off, and Robin, letting his arrows lie unheeded, dropped his chin on his fists and stared at the fire. Tom had set him thinking about his own future, and he was wishing he cared as much as Tom did for the trade to which he was soon to be apprenticed. Cloth—everlasting cloth—buying the wool from the sheepmasters of the downs—giving it out to the

cottage spinners—overseeing the dyers and weavers—watching that the weavers didn't craftily stretch the stuff too much on their racks—and then the marketing of the fustian to the country folks round about, and blue cloth to the great merchants who shipped it abroad to the Canary Islands . . . it was a dull job, whichever way you looked at it. And lately, his uncle grumbled, the trade wasn't what it was. Those rascally weavers of Godalming had gained Guildford cloth a bad name by their over-stretching. Robin wondered if his uncle might not be guilty of a little stretching himself. Heigh-ho, what it was to be a younger son and have to be put to a trade! Not that he was particularly keen on farming either.

Who was that with Uncle Parkyn below in the counting house? Robin had been half aware for some time of a murmur of voices rising from below, but it didn't interest him. Now one voice came up loud and rather angry.

'So it comes to this, that you 'd like to let those rogues off—after your son and nephew have set their lives at hazard, too, to bring them to book—and all, forsooth, because you fear a parcel of sheepmasters!'

'Master Beckingham, Master Beckingham, do pray you speak more low! Look, it's this way—the way trade is declining I and my like can't buy up all the wool as we used to; and abroad they 're clamouring for good English wool; and the taxes on wool sent abroad do press most cruel hard, as you 'd know if you weren't as good as London-bred! So you can't be too hard on them for trying to sell their goods abroad 'thout paying dues.'

'I say these sheepmasters 'll be the ruin of Old England! You should hear what Master Thomas More, Under-Sheriff of London, says about sheepmasters! They turn good farmland into pastures, and send the poor folks packing from their homes, just to make money by selling wool. And now do you tell me that they are in league with these fly-by-nights, these ruffians, these owlers——?'

'Oh, tch! tch! I 'm saying naught—I 'm charging nobody. But I do say there 's a deal of sympathy with them among the common people. And surely you must see that I can't afford to quarrel with them that sells me my wool . . . and—and I wish to heaven these young varlets had never meddled with what was no affair of theirs, by Saint Blaize I do!'

'A pretty mayor you are, thus to wink at as arrant a breaking of the king his laws as ever I heard tell of!' Richard Beckingham was plainly losing his temper. 'You petty townfolk are all alike—can't see the good of the realm for thinking of your own small affairs! And is that mettlesome boy, my dead brother's godson, to be tied to your merchandise, and his wings plucked till he 's just such another as yourself? I would my brother were alive—he 'd have some say in the matter, I dare swear. He 'd be asking, too, as I ask—and that 's what I came for—how comes it that you 've let seven years go by since his death—God rest his soul!—and done nothing about purchasing that land that was to build the new grammar school? Eh? What have you to say to that?'

'As to that,' Mayor Parkyn put on his most dignified air, 'you know very well, for I writ you the same, that there have been difficulties. Master Smallpiece, who owns the most convenient land, would not sell; and some of the moneys have not been forthcoming from your brother's estate at Southwark. *You* should know about that!'

Robin cocked an ear joyfully. This sounded a truly jolly quarrel—he cared not two hoots on whose side the right might be! When Master Beckingham next spoke his tone was more moderate.

'Lawyers' delays—lawyers' delays!' he protested. 'Sharks and grabbers, the whole lot of them—always excepting my good friend Thomas More. He 's the one lawyer that I know who isn't all for feathering his own nest.'

'He must be the marvel of his age, then,' muttered Mayor Parkyn.

'Ay is he! And a scholar to boot. The friend of Erasmus, the trusted ambassador of the king (he was sent to the Low Countries only last year on a matter of trade agreements). But withal as simple and homely a man as you would wish to see, and never forgets his old friends.'

'I wish I knew him. I've a parcel of land out at Stoughton . . .' The voices dropped again, and Robin lost interest. One thing was explained, anyhow— why his uncle Parkyn had not been among those who rode after the owlers, though his own son was involved in it; and why he had not joined in the chorus of praise which the three boys felt they had well deserved. Robin shrugged his shoulders. He did not very much admire his uncle Parkyn!

Hallo, what was that? A clatter of horse's hoofs in the court behind the house, and Robin could hear the outer door of the counting house flung open violently. Then a harsh voice demanded loudly:

'Where be my son Tom?'

'Your son 's at school, where he should be, Ned Elrington,' answered Master Parkyn, very much the mayor. 'And will you please to shut the door?'

The door was slammed furiously.

'Afore I fetches en, will you please to give me the rights of this? What 've he been up to, I want to know. I sent en here to get schooling, not to mix himself up with this fly-by-night owling business. I thought you an honest man, Mus' Parkyn, or I 'd never ha' trusted you with en.'

'Your son Tom——' began the mayor indignantly, but Richard Beckingham's voice, smooth and soothing, cut in.

'Your son Tom, Master Elrington, as I suppose you be, has borne himself like a gallant lad and a good citizen. He has been the means of capturing a dozen of arrant knaves as ever cheated the king's revenue——'

But Elrington was not soothed. 'Aye, that's what I'm complaining of! What call had he to interfere with them as was only a-getting of their living? Now he've imbrangled me with them as I was wishful to stand well with—let alone putting my works in danger.'

'Why, Master Elrington, how may that be?' inquired Beckingham.

'You're a London man, I take it, by your speech——'

'It is Master Richard Beckingham, grocer of London——' Mayor Parkyn introduced him.

'And so you don't rightly know the way things is in these parts,' Elrington went on. 'King's writ don't run overmuch in West Surrey——'

'Hey!' exclaimed Master Beckingham, and Mayor Parkyn protested, 'Ned Elrington, Ned Elrington, I'm sure West Surrey is as loyal——'

'Oh, we be all the king's very good subjects! I for one don't wish to cheat him of his lawful dues! But facts is facts. And facts is that the sheep-owning gentry of Surrey and Sussex is hand in glove with the owlers, and the owlers is hand in glove with the men o' the heath, or they'd never run their goods down to the coast. And I've a forge at Abinger, and have to fetch my iron from Vachery across the heath. *Now* d' you see why I don't want to fall foul of the owlers?'

'I see that West Surrey is a nest of law-breakers, and that those who should be in authority are no better themselves!' cried Beckingham.

'Now, now, now, you are unjust, I swear you are!' pleaded the mayor. 'You don't allow for our troubles and hardships, Master Beckingham, indeed you don't. I'm sure I do my best——'

'I got no time to be chaffering here,' growled Elrington. 'I'm come for to fetch my son Tom. If he hasn't learned his ciphering by now he's been wasting his time. I'll go get him.'

'Nay, come up and drink a cup of sack. I'll send for him.' The mayor shouted orders to an apprentice. 'You're wet with your ride—you shall dry your cloak.'

'Ah—well—I don't deny I'm dry within, though wet without.' Booted steps sounded on the stair. Elrington thrust open the inner door without ceremony, and strode into the parlour. He was an immensely tall, lean, leather-coloured man, and Robin, standing up to make his bow, thought that he would have known him anywhere as Tom's father.

'My nephew—and my son,' Mayor Parkyn said briefly. Dick, drowsy-eyed and ruffled like a little owl, stumbled to his feet. But, beyond a curt nod Elrington took no further notice of them. Boys were very much to be seen and not heard in those days.

Parkyn called for wine, and the three men sat down at the table. Elrington stretched out his muddy, booted legs and sat in scowling silence. Beckingham stared at him with scornful dislike, Robin thought; and Mayor Parkyn, very uncomfortable between the two of them, cast about for a safe subject.

'This Master More you were talking of,' he ventured, 'he's a scholar, you say? I'm thinking of making a scholar of my Dick here. He can read Latin like his mother tongue! Would you advise, now, for him to go into the church or take up lawyering like Master More?'

Elrington, who was not interested in Dick, said nothing. But Beckingham answered politely.

'It lies on what sort the lad is. If I might venture to advise, Master Mayor, I'd let him choose for himself.'

'It's in my mind to pay a visit to London in the spring, when I shall have laid down the burden of my office.' Parkyn squared his narrow shoulders. 'Maybe you'd do me the favour of helping me to meet Master More?'

'Thomas More is a very busy man,' Beckingham was



beginning coldly, when Dick, who had recovered his wits, interrupted:

'Oh sir, your pardon! But, please sir—this Master More—is he the friend of Erasmus, the great scholar?'

'Why, what do you know of Erasmus?'

'Not very much,' confessed Dick, 'but I've read a book of his, and 'tis dedicated to Master Thomas More. He knows Greek, 'tis said—I wish Brother Geoffrey knew more Greek. And do you really know Master More himself? And have you met Master Erasmus?'

'Thomas More I have met, and a most merry, learned and kindly gentleman he is.' Beekingham thawed to Dick's eagerness. 'Erasmus I have seen, but have not spoken with. You go on with your learning, my lad, and get your father to send you to Oxford, and maybe you 'll get your chance, some day, to meet with great scholars like Erasmus.'

'Some day—that's a long way off!' Dick breathed.

'If you're a good lad, maybe I 'll take you to London with me in the spring,' his father said consolingly—he was very fond of Dick. 'And we might get a sight at least of some of these great men.'

'Oh!' cried Dick, big-eyed. And just then Tom Elrington sauntered in, bowed carelessly to the company, and greeted his father with:

'Heard you wanted me, sir.'

'Go, pack your bags, sirrah!' Elrington growled. 'You're coming home with me this night where I can have you under my eye and keep you out of mischief.'

Tom shrugged his shoulders and made for the door.

'Have you naught to say?' his father shouted after him.

'Just as you will, sir!' Tom's words were dutiful, but there was something in his tone that made Beekingham smile, Parkyn purse his mouth and Elrington seize his mug with a furious 'Tcha!' before he drained it.

'If Tom weren't willing to go, he 'd ha' found a way to stay, I 'll lay!' Robin whispered to Dick.

'It 'll be dull without him,' Dick returned.

'Father Geoffrey won't mind—he always said Tom took your mind off your studies,' added Robin.

In a very short time Tom was down again, swinging his duffle bag by one hand and with a small leather trunk balanced on his shoulder. Elrington made no ceremony, but sprang up and hurried into the courtyard. Tom threw down his baggage and came over to his friends.

'It 's as well I 'm going,' he said. 'I 've learned all I want here, and my father needs me—little as he thinks it. Don't look so glum, boys! We 'll meet again—I 'll see to that. Dick, mind your books! Robin—ch, Robin, I can't somehow see you in your uncle's business! I wonder——'

'Tom! Tom, ye lazy loon!' thundered Elrington's voice outside.

Tom grinned, gave each of his friends a firm hug—after the fashion of the time—picked up his luggage and went out. Presently they saw him ride past the window on his sturdy nag, the rain in his face and a twisted grin on his lips.

That night the owlers, no one knew how, broke from their prison and escaped.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CHARCOAL BURNERS

'Tom!' bawled Ned Elrington. 'Tom! Pest take the boy, he's never where he ought to be. Tom!'

'Maybe he's after owlers again,' suggested Sir Edmund Bray, winking.

'Hey?' Elrington swung round on his visitor with wide open eyes.

'Oh, I heard of it, never fear. And I say the lad did right—but it was dangerous, none the less.'

'He'd got no call to interfere,' Elrington growled. 'Surrey ain't sheep country, properly speaking, so what's a little wool running? Iron's our job.'

'You be thankful,' put in the third man, a wiry, bright-eyed little terrier of a fellow, 'that Surrey isn't sheep country. Aye! In the Midlands the sheep have ate up whole villages——'

But Elrington was not interested in sheep.

'Tom!' he shouted again, and this time Bray added his voice.

'Owen! Owen!—When boys get together there's no breaking them apart.'

'And where's your little maid and my Billy got to?' added the terrier-like man.

'Plucking palms for Easter, very likely. Beatrice will have an eye to your little lad, Rastell,' said Bray reassuringly. 'All the same, it's time we were making for home, or my lady will be fretting. Never mind the firebacks now, Elrington. Send Tom over to Shere this evening and I'll show him what I want.'

'Tom!' roared Elrington, fit to burst his lungs, and this time a voice floated up from the thickets by the river bank:

'Here, father!'

'Ten thousand devils!' Elrington strode away in the direction of the voice, followed by Bray and Rastell, both laughing.

'Our Tom is something of an idle apprentice, I take it?' hinted Rastell.

'By no means! The lad's got iron in his blood—works at his father's forge like a man, though not fifteen yet. They've ambition, these Elringtons. Ned's not content with the most thriving trade in these parts—I suppose he's made the park gates for half the gentry—but he longs to be casting cannon for the king—or any one else.'

'Cannon, eh?' said Rastell with a jump. 'Cannon? Well, now, I wonder——'

'What have you to do with cannon, Master Rastell? I thought your printing took all your time.'

Rastell shook his head. 'I've plenty to do, I grant you. But times I grow sick of London. I get a fancy now and again to fare beyond the seas and have a look at these New Found Lands.'

'What would you find there but savages? England's good enough for me.'

'Maybe it's a book I've been reading that put it into my head—written by my brother-in-law and dear friend Thomas More. It was printed overseas though, and in Latin. I'd like to ha' done it myself.'

'What, More the lawyer? I've heard of him. They say he's going to be a great man soon. So he's your brother-in-law, eh? Hallo! Here's our youngsters—and gracious heavens, look at my little maid! Owen, ye wicked boy, how could ye let your sister get in such a plight?'

'Could I help it?' Owen Bray, barelegged, stood in the water and grinned at his father. 'Look what Tom Elrington has made—it's a proper water-hammer, as neat as ever you saw!'

Ned Elrington, his anger forgotten, was stooping over

his son's work. Beatrice Bray, her skirts hitched high, but pretty bedraggled for all that, hopped up and down excitedly, while little Will Rastell squatted solemnly in the mud and stared.

'Father, father, come and see,' squealed Beatrice, dragging Bray by the hand. 'Look—see—the water pours into those little boxes on the wheel and drags it round——'

'And the long pole from the hub turns the little wheel inside the smithy——' Owen pranced and splashed.

'Then the knobs on the little wheel catch the shaft of the hammer and lift it up——'

'And it falls on the iron—bang, bang,' finished Will.

'Tom wants a big one that would really hammer iron,' said Beatrice, staring up at her father with the blue eyes that Tom had noticed on the day of the bear-baiting.

'Aye!' Bray laughed. 'But to turn a wheel big enough to raise a full-size hammer he'd need to dam the stream and flood my best pasture meadows—and that I'm not minded to have.'

He looked at Ned Elrington, who straightened his long back and gave back stare for stare.

'You mean I can't pay your price.'

'Or won't.'

'Take it either way. You'll be glad yet to have my hammer ponds at Abinger.'

'Oh, we've had all this out before. I'm not having it, and that's that. Beatrice, what'll your mother say? Get your shoes, children. It's time we were getting back to supper.'

He swung Beatrice up on his shoulder and made for the smithy, outside which the horses were tethered. Rastell strolled by Elrington, holding Will by the hand and talking hard. Owen lingered by Tom, whom he admired tremendously.

'Father's stubborn as—as a donkey,' he murmured. 'When the land's mine, you shall have what you want.'

'That's a long time to wait!' Tom shrugged his shoulders. 'I reckon if father don't get his way soon he 'll lose patience and go back to Sussex. 'Tis a mortal shame!' he burst out suddenly. 'He 'd set his heart on starting the furthest north of the southern ironworks—and here 's as snug a little place as a man could wish for, water and timber and all, and the countryside crying out for iron! Ah well!' he caught himself up. 'A man has a right to do as he will wi' his own land. Get you gone, Owen, your father's waiting.'

Owen, having got his boots on, trotted off obediently. Tom stretched and sighed. He had so looked forward to beginning work as his father's apprentice, but in the four months that had passed he had found little but disappointment. His father, continually hampered by lack of water power, grew more and more short-tempered, and Tom missed his friends more than he had thought possible. Owen was all very well, but he was more like a faithful dog than a mate and an equal. Blue-eyed Beatrice had more sense, if it came to that!

But when he finally made his way up to the smithy, he found Ned Elrington in a surprisingly good temper, though his first remark was in the nature of a grumble.

'They han't sent that load of charcoal I was expecting. You 'll ha' to ride over to the charcoal burners' camp to-morrow morn, Tom.'

'Uh-huh!' Tom grunted assentingly. He liked the prospect—charcoal burning, like anything connected with iron, interested him immensely.

'I been talking with that Mus' Rastell,' his father went on. 'He 's mad.'

Tom couldn't quite see why that pleased his father so much.

'Comes of having too much to do with books,' Elrington went on, cracking his knuckles in a way he had when pleased. 'He 's got a notion that somewhere back of that

New Found Land Master Cabot discovered there's a country where everything goes right. What did he call it—Utopia I think it was. Crazy, of course. *But*—he talks of fitting out a ship to go in quest of it.'

'Hm?' grunted Tom questioningly.

'He 'pears to have money for it—or friends that 'll put it up for him. His wife's sister to Thomas More, I hear. And o' course he must have cannon for protection on the high seas.'

'Aah!' Tom breathed understandingly.

'You see, do you?' His father dug him in the ribs. 'Even without the water-hammer we can make a two-three cannon, I reckon. Eh? And that's a start, that is. Get some folks in London interested in our Surrey iron-works, and maybe Sir Edmund 'll have to think again.'

Next morning Tom rode up through the woods, by a lane which the feet of pack ponies had sunk deep between orange sandy banks, to where the charcoal burners had pitched their camp in Abinger Bottom. It was a bare three miles, but the narrow valleys were so cloaked with oak woods that he might have been in an endless forest. You could not see, from below, the heights where the oaks gave way to pine, and heaths covered with scrubby gorse and heather, though the oaks were still winter-bare.

'Reckon I ride on a bootless errand,' he thought as he jogged along. 'Tis downright unreasonable of father to expect charcoal this time o' year, and the weather we been having. No matter—he's not good to cross these days.'

It was mild and pleasant for late March. The catkins spilled their yellow dust on Tom's hat as he brushed them; the buds were fat and bloomy-looking, and in some places already showed the tender green; on the slopes the bright spears of bluebell leaves pushed up through the pale dry bracken, and there were early primroses under sheltered banks. Above the knotted branches the sky was patchily blue, and Tom whistled contentedly. Already he could

hear the thud of axes which told him that work was afoot. Over the ridge he rode, dropped down into the bottom, and came out into the clearing where the huts of the charcoal burners huddled. Rather to his surprise, a thin blue smoke showed that they had seized the chance to fire the stacks that stood like giant beehives in the centre of the open space.

There seemed to be an uncommon number of men about—more, surely, than the usual half dozen or so who tended the furnaces. Sooty-faced and goblin-like in their sacking garments, the burners moved about the stacks. But who were those others, wild and ragged, who sat and sprawled on the damp ground?

Tom shouted a greeting as he trotted up.

' 'Tis young Tom Elrington,' he heard one of the charcoal burners grunt, and then, before he could even pull up his pony, the ragged men were on their feet and came round him with a rush, clutching his bridle and his arms, pressing their tanned fierce faces close to his, snarling like curs.

Tom kicked his pony and it reared, scattering them for a moment and knocking some to the ground. But before he had time to swing about they were on him again, pulled him from his seat, and flung him down among the mud and sticks. The charcoal burners looked on indifferent or grinning. They were as shaven as a shaven lot at best, made half savage by their lonely life, and in league with every poacher, cut-purse, and outlaw in the district.

'What d' you want of me?' asked Tom, spitting chips out of his mouth. 'I've no gold on me—no, nor silver either. There may be a groat or so in my pouch, and you're welcome to it.'

'It's not your money that we want, 'Tom Elrington. You won't go meddling with honest owlers no more when we've done with you. You can say your prayers if you like, but best be quick about it.'



'So that 's it, is it?' Tom's heart was thumping, but he kept his head. 'Well, I dunno what good my death 'll do ye, nor it don't seem just somehow, seeing you be all free and alive. What 's more, 'twasn't you I was after—it was that fool Peter Coe. What 's come of him?'

'We don't know, and care less,' was the growled answer. 'And it 's no thanks to you, Tom Elrington, that we ain't hanged.'

'Ah, cut the cur's throat and be done with it!'

'Hob! Snell! Diggory!' Tom called sharply to the charcoal burners. ' 'Tis you 'll get the blame if murder's done!'

'Who 's to blame us?' No un 'll ever find your corpse,' grinned the man called Snell.

'Tidden' no concern of ours,' said Diggory.

'You and your like 's no particular friends to the like o' we,' added Hob.

Tom saw that he was in the tightest of tight corners. Bribery would be of no use, even if he had anything to bribe with. These men—outlaws with nothing to hope for and every man's hand against them—had not a shred of kindly feeling he could appeal to. Threats they would laugh at. Only his coolness had held them off for a moment. If he could just keep steady, surely something would happen! He wasn't meant to die in this silly, useless way, because of a midnight prank. He forced a laugh.

'What 's the jest?' said the man who was sitting on him.

'I 'll keep that to myself,' Tom returned. 'You 're going to have my life, seemingly, but I 'll have the last laugh.'

He had them puzzled now. They fancied he had something up his sleeve!

'You tell us what 's tickling you, or——' The man on his chest flourished a knife.

'Why, you 're going to cut my throat anyway. Why should I tell first and die later?' Tom was just playing for

time, though what time could do for him, he had no idea. 'I know what I know.' He laughed again, full in the face that bent over him.

'Pah, the brat's only playing with us!' A one-eyed man kicked Tom in the ribs.

'Have it your own way,' said Tom. 'Dead men tell no tales—nor nothing else. Cut my throat and get it done with.'

But now he was doing more than play for time. With his head on the ground he could hear, what the others could not, a steady drumming that vibrated through the earth. Somewhere a rider, riders perhaps, were cantering down the trackway. If he could only hold the owlers off a little longer!

'What're you waiting for?' he bluffed. 'Cut my heart out—maybe the jest that makes me smile is written there? What matter? You'll know in good time—ah, one o' these days you'll know. And you'll mayhap be sorry—or mayhap be glad.'

A knobby and very dirty pair of hands clutched him by the throat.

'Tell us, ye whelp! What're ye hiding?'

'It might be——' Tom spoke slowly, as if considering. 'No! I'll say naught. Why should I?' The hoof beats were nearer now. In a moment the men would hear them, and that would be the most dangerous time of all. 'You're going to kill me anyway, and why should I share what I know? Think I'd trust ye? You that'd murder a lad you've never seen, only because of a tale that he'd done ye a mischief? You that take no heed if a fellow is for ye or against ye or thinks naught of ye at all——' He was gabbling at random, anything to hold their attention. 'I'll get no good of it, whether I live or die, so die I will, anyway you choose, and you'll die soon after, that I swear, ay, and horribly too, dancing on air at the gibbet's end—ha ha ha!' Tom's laughter was not forced now, it was wild and half hysterical, for his self-control had broken as

the hoof beats drummed in the hollow lane and clinked sharply on half buried stones. Now the ruffians heard them too.

'Tst! Cover!'

Tom's chest was freed from the weight of bony knees—the clearing was empty except for the charcoal burners calmly stirring about their work, as Owen and Beatrice Bray cantered out from the trees and pulled up in surprise at seeing Tom stretched on the ground.

'Hallo! Why, Tom! What's amiss?' Owen blurted out, as Tom raised himself up gingerly, a bit at a time, for he was sore.

Tom knew that the woods were full of lurking shadows and peering eyes, and that the danger was not over yet. The owlers might, if they thought themselves threatened, attack the children, for they were as reckless as only desperate men can be.

'Polly tripped and I took a spill,' he answered. 'Wow! but I've bumped my head! Come here, lady!' He reached for Polly's bridle.

'I thought I heard you laughing,' went on Owen, looking puzzled.

'Oh, aye, I hope I can laugh at myself when I look an ass,' answered Tom. 'But what are you two doing here?'

'Why, we came to seek for you—your father told us where you had gone. Why not?' Beatrice looked at him wide-eyed. 'Tom, you are all over mud and leaves. Let me brush you down.'

Tom found it rather pleasant to have her little hands so kindly busy about him, after the rough handling of the outlaws. Meanwhile Snell the charcoal burner approached him, decently civil.

'And what's your will, Master Tom?' he inquired. But he winked.

'What would it be, but to know if you've that load of charcoal ready for my father?' Tom winked back.

'Well now!' said Snell in a complaining tone, 'if that don't beat all! There isn't many colliers, let me tell you, as 'd be at work at all this time o' year, and you can tell Master Elrington he 's lucky in his workmen, so he is, that they lose no day whatever the season. The coal 'll be ready the morn's noon, and us 'll have it carted come Saturday, let him trust to that. Us be poor men,' he went on with special meaning, 'at the mercy o' wind and weather—and other things—and us can't always do as us 'd wish,' d' ye take my meaning?'

'I do,' said Tom.

'So if us seemed careless like—us couldn't do naught, d' ye see—not if our lives was at stake—as may be they was, if you take me?'

'I take you,' Tom agreed.

'But if 'twas anything that lay in our power—why, Master Tom, seeing as you have a right good heart in your body—and good wits in your head, too—you wouldn't bear it against poor honest colliers that they didn't do no more, d' ye see?'

'I see,' nodded Tom.

'But we do stand your friends, mind that. 'Cause we know a high heart when we see it, and I can't say more.'

'You can't say more,' said Tom.

'And if I might make so bold,' Snell pressed closer, and the smell of sweat and wood smoke came all bitter from his sacking, 'I 'd like to say that these woods bain't good for the health of some folks. No, nor any o' these here parts, not for growing lads. Ye might get taken with—with a fever, like—or worse——'

What is the fellow talking of!' cried Owen impatiently.

'It 's true, there 's a marshy sort of ague in these bottoms,' Tom said thoughtfully. 'I reckon you 're right, Snell, and we won't ride this way for a bit. Come on, let 's be getting home. I want a plaster for my head—there 's a bump as big as a pigeon's egg on the back of it.'

They had to ride single file through the sunken track ways, and it was not until they had cleared the woods and were out on the broad lane that led to Abinger that Tom explained what had really happened. The children were awed and excited.

'Why, Tom, then we saved your life!' Owen cried.

'Reckon you did, and I 'm thankful to you,' Tom said soberly.

'But *I* think you saved your own self,' was Beatrice's comment. 'If you hadn't been so brave and clever, they 'd have killed you out of hand, Tom.'

'A fellow can sometimes think quickly when his neck 's at stake,' laughed Tom.

'You won't be safe hercabouts for a while,' Owen pondered. 'They 're a naughty lot, those owlers.'

'And the odd thing is,' mused Tom, 'that did they but know it they owed their capture not to me at all, but to Robin and Dickon.'

' 'Pears to me it would be a good thing if all three of you got out of Surrey for a while,' said Beatrice, solemnly. 'I wouldn't like you to be killed, Tom. After all, you all saved *my* life from that nasty bear.'

'And now you 've paid all scores. Well, I 'll see what father says.'

They parted at the forge door, and Tom, his head throbbing, and feeling rather shaky now the excitement had died down, went in to tell Ned Elrington his adventure.

'See what comes of meddling with what 's none of your affairs!' his father grumbled—exactly as Tom had expected. 'And those lubberly villainous colliers never raised finger to aid ye! I 've a mind to send 'em packing and bring in others—'

'Don't do that!' begged Tom. 'After all, they 're at the mercy of all outlaws, living so lonely like. And I think Snell stands my friend from now on, so far as in him lies.'

'Which isn't much!' snorted Eltrington. 'Well—it do look as if he was right, and Surrey bain't too good for you, for a while. Let me think.'

'I'll carry a pistol with me when I ride abroad, if that'll content you,' Tom suggested. 'But look here, sir. If I'm in danger, how about Robin and Dickon?'

'They're safe enough in Guildford town.'

'Dick may be—and it's odds they don't know he was concerned in our affair. But Robin—they've had him in their hands once, and would know him again. He has a lonely bit of road to ride when he goes between Stoke and the town.'

'I'll send a warning to Mus' Polstead, if that's what's troubling ye. But as for you, Tom—I reckon you'd be better out of these parts for a time.'

'I can take care of myself now I know what to watch for,' said Tom sturdily.

His father took no notice of this boast.

''Twould do ye no harm to see something o' the world. My friend Mus' Bolton of London has a shop in Ironmongers' Lane and a forge behind it. How if I send you to him for a month or two, just till this blows over? 'Twill give ye a chance to learn something of how the foreign trade goes—not that that concerns us now, but ye never know.'

'Ah! And the great ships come up the river, don't they?' Tom turned the notion over in his mind and found it pleasing. 'If we're to make a go of this cannon business, it'll be as well to see other men's work; also how they mount the guns on board. Yes, father, I'd like very well to go.'

'What odds whether ye like it or not, if I say you're to go? I'll ride with ye to London next week and talk to Jamie Bolton myself. Now mind, no idling while you're away! I'll expect you to earn your keep, and to have your eyes open for aught that may be of profit to us.'

'Trust me!'

'The 'prentices o' London are a scurvy lot, as I've heard,' went on Elrington, 'always dicing and fighting and breaking heads. Let's ha' none of that, now. If you hear the cry, "'Prentices and clubs!" you just take no heed. 'Tis no concern o' yours what Londoners get up to.'

'Aye, sir,' answered Tom obediently. He had no doubt of being able to carry out his father's orders. As for getting into mischief, that was not his way at all, reflected Tom virtuously. At least, no one was going to lead him into trouble. If there were any adventures going, he would be the one to take the lead himself!

'Very well then, that's settled. And you can see about getting together what you'll need. Don't think to buy yourself any fineries in London—I'll give you enough money for your needs, and anything else you'll have to earn.'

'Very right, father.' Tom was not in the least aggrieved at his father's economy. His heart was as set as Ned Elrington's on the water-hammer, and he had no intention of wasting any money.

So Squire Polstead got a warning that made him ride over to Guildford in a hurry, and Tom Elrington disappeared from Surrey.

## CHAPTER IX

### LONDON IS A FINE TOWN

THAT was why, early in April, Robin Polstead found himself riding joyously London-wards with his uncle Parkyn, his cousin Dick, and the Guildford burgesses Masters Smallpiece and Norbrigge. Master Parkyn was making his annual journey to London, to dispose of his cloth to the Merchant Adventurers at Blackwell Hall; so he travelled with a goodly string of laden pack-hornies and horseboys. Master Smallpiece the mercer was in search of novelties—laces, pins, embroideries, ribbons, lawn, and trinkets, brought back from foreign lands by these same merchants from overseas, by which he hoped to charm money from the purses of Surrey ladies. And Master Norbrigge, who wanted to be up to date with all the newest ideas for the fine new houses which gentlemen were building all over the country, came with them because travelling with so large a company promised safety from the robbers and outlaws who still lurked in heath and covert.

It was the story of Tom's adventure, brought by Squire Polstead at the gallop, which finally decided Master Parkyn to make the journey. Mistress Parkyn was sure, as soon as she heard it, that Dick was liable to be stolen out of his bed by owlers any fine night, and she suddenly switched over from hysterics at the idea of Dick's going away to hysterics at his delaying for an hour. And Master Polstead said very firmly that Robin must go too. Uncle Parkyn was not over-pleased to saddle himself with 'a mischievous, chestnut-pated, good-for-nothing imp,' as he grumbled; and he swore that the expedition would make Robin idler than ever. But Squire Polstead insisted. Once in London, he said, Parkyn would be quit of Robin, who



could put up with his uncle Beckingham. But for the next month or so he must be out of Surrey, that was flat!

For Robin it was like being let out of prison.

'Oh, Dickon, this is good!' he cried, trying to make sober Jenny prance and caper. 'How I have hated these last months!'

'Have you, Robin? I'm sorry. What ailed you at them? And why didn't you tell me?'

'What good would it ha' done? You couldn't help, and you were happy with your books and Brother Geoffrey. 'Times I've caught myself longing for the old school whipping post! Sweeping floors and stacking cloth, winding quills for the weavers' and running errands for John and William isn't my notion of life. I liked fetching the yarn from the spinners, but since that time was stopped 'long of this owler scare, I haven't been out of Guildford.'

'Never mind,' comforted Dick. 'Some day you'll be senior 'prentice; and after that father will help you to set up as a clothier for yourself, and maybe you'll come to be Mayor of Guildford.'

'Don't know that I want to be,' said Robin perversely. 'But let's not talk of that now. We're going to London town, and I shall at least see the great ships, even if I never can sail on one.'

'I think your brain is turned over ships,' Dick teased him.

'All that you want, I dare swear, is to bury yourself among the bookshops,' retorted Robin.

'No, that I don't! I want to catch a sight of some of the great men Brother Geoffrey has told me of—Master Dean Colet who built the fine new school in Paul's churchyard, and Master Grocyn, and above all Erasmus the wonderful Dutchman. They say he often visits Master Thomas More.'

'Never heard of any of 'em barring Thomas More,' sniffed Robin. 'Uncle Parkyn's for ever talking of him and wishing he could get acquainted. But I'd like to see

the great Cardinal Wolsey—they say it 's nearly as good as a royal procession to see him ride through the streets in his scarlet robes, and his horses all trapped with velvet!

'I saw the king, once, hunting in Guildford Park,' Dick remembered, 'but only afar off. I wonder if we 'll see him close to? They say he 's the biggest and handsomest man in England. I say, Robin! Did you know there were three queens in London at this time?'

'What are you telling me?' scoffed Robin. 'There 's only one queen—Catherine the Spanish lady, God save her!'

'You 're wrong. There 's the king's two sisters—Margaret of Scotland, her that fled home when Queen Catherine beat the Scots at Flodden. —'

'Oh, I remember. While the king was fighting in France, o' course. Four years ago, wasn't it? Well, who 's the other queen?'

'Mary of France, to be sure. The king's youngest sister. She married the old French king.'

'But, Dick, she 's not a queen now. Old French Louis i. dead. Don't you remember she made a love match with the Duke of Suffolk? So she 's only a duchess.'

'Have it your own way, then,' said Dick. 'But *I* say there are three queens in England.'

It took the party three days to get to Southwark, for there had been heavy rain recently and the roads were deep in mire. They slept one night at Cobham and the next at Kingston, where Master Norbrigge, who was a mason, insisted on going over to have a look at the grand new palace which Cardinal Wolsey was building at Hampton Court. Finally they arrived at Southwark too late to enter the town that evening, and spent one more night on the road. Early on the fourth day the party rode up to the gate tower of famous London Bridge.

The London of those days was no bigger than a fair-sized market town to-day, but to the boys—and indeed to their elders—it seemed stupendous. The day was one of

those clear bright days of spring, with rain not far off, when everything stands out sharp and clean-coloured; and there was no coal smoke to spoil the view. Bright blue and wind-ruffled ran the Thames, busy as a highway with darting boats, many-oared barges, and below the bridge the tall masts of broad-beamed merchant ships. Beyond it rose clustered spires and gabled roofs, the gardens of noblemen's houses running down to the water, wharfs and jetties, and in the distance the blue wooded heights of Highgate and Hampstead.

But it was the bridge itself which fascinated Dick and Robin; and indeed old London Bridge was one of the wonders of the world.

'Why, it's a castle!' gasped Dick, staring at the great gatehouse and drawbridge which guarded its southern end. Luckily for their first impressions, there were no hideous shrivelled heads of 'traitors' raised on poles to spoil the beauty of the sight, for Henry VIII was still young, happy, and popular.

'Don't stay gaping there, boys!' called out Master Parkyn sharply. 'Keep close beside me. All keep together, or we'll be jostled apart. Did ever you see such a press? We'll be lucky if we haven't our purses cut.'

'I'll keep my hand tight on mine, you may be sure,' nodded Master Smallpiece. 'A villainous set of faces as ever I set eyes on.' And he clutched at the leather wallet hanging from his girdle.

Slowly the Surrey party urged their horses in among the throng of market carts, pack mules, laden donkeys, farmers' wives with baskets of dairy produce, and sellers of fish and vegetables going in, and against the lesser stream of serving men, travellers, and such as had business in the fields going out. Once beyond the gatehouse, nothing was to be seen of the river! The bridge was a complete street of shops and houses.

There was no more talking as they squeezed their way

through the narrow lane—the din made it impossible. Shopkeepers screeched their wares, women yelled at one another from the upper windows, foot passengers dodged and cursed, carriers and carters shouted at their teams and swore at one another, wheels squeaked, hoofs clattered, ironware clanged. Dickon, who hated crowds and noise, looked white and nervous and kept his pony as close to Robin's as he could. Robin himself was excited by it all, and his quick eyes darted here and there, taking it all in—or as much as he could in the confusion.

Suddenly a face flashed at him—a lean yellowish face with shifty eyes. It was gone before he could be sure if he was recognized, and when he searched the crowd he could not find it again. But he was in no doubt that he had caught a glimpse of Peter Coö!

Once over the bridge there was a little more room, but not much. Master Smallpiece, who had been in London before, pointed out the grim bulk of the Tower looming above the houses on their right, and on their left the long roof and tall spire of St. Paul's upon its hill. But nobody was much interested. They were jostled and bewildered, and only anxious to get to the inn in Bread Street where Smallpiece had stayed, and which he said was decent and respectable and much used by small merchants up from the country.

'Ffh!' said Dick, twitching his nose, 'London's a fine town to look at—from outside. But when you're in it, how it stinks!'

'Fishy!' sniffed Robin, 'and no wonder!' Just to the right were the wharves and stairs, all slippery with the slime of the morning's catch, which shouting porters were scrambling into baskets and bearing away through the narrow lanes.

'That's a fine handsome building by the waterside!' remarked Master Norbrigge, looking over his left shoulder as they began to climb Fish Hill.

'Ah, that's the Steelyard, that is,' Master Smallpiece instructed him. 'That's where they merchants from Germany and the Low Countries—Hansa merchants they call 'emselves—do have their headquarters. Rich they be, beyond telling, I've heard.'

'Ah,' responded Norbriggs rather sourly. 'I know of 'em. And how do they get their wealth but by bringing in iron, timber, tar rope, hides and such as we can very well get in our own country. Taking the bread out of honest Englishmen's mouths.'

'Oh, come on! come on!' urged Master Parkyn peevishly. 'Time enough for looking about us later. Here, Master Smallpiece, which way do we turn now?'

'Round left, into Candlewick Street.' Smallpiece pushed his horse forward, by accident jostling a 'prentice lad who was screaming his master's wares from an open shop front.

'Pest on ye, look how ye've mired my horse! Think you own the town, do ye? Dirty foreigners!' The boy scowled so uglily that Master Smallpiece edged his horse away with a 'Sorry, lad! Sorry! It's these plaguy narrow streets —',

But the 'prentice's face smoothed out and he grinned.

'Ah, you're no foreigners by your talk! I took you for one o' them proud-stomached Dutchmen—and you're only a simpleton up from the country.'

'London manners—London manners!' muttered Smallpiece, while Robin and Dick grinned. The 'prentice winked at them and went on yelling 'What d' ye lack? What d' ye lack? Boots and shoes, all o' the best tanned leather!'

'We've left the fish behind, but it doesn't smell any better,' Dick complained.

'Ware!' shouted a voice above them, and a pailful of rubbish and slops came swishing down from an upper window, catching Master Parkyn's horse on the nose and

making it toss its head and spatter its master's furred gown. Parkyn looked up and acidly said what he thought, but the woman at the window was more than equal to him at that game. When she had finished telling him where he came from and where he was going to she slammed the casement to with a laugh.

'I tell you what,' remarked Master Parkyn angrily. 'There's too much of London altogether! This road is fetlock deep in filth, and for why? Too many houses! Come up, Silver! That was a dead cat he slipped on.'

But when at last they turned into Bread Street, they found it quieter. Once it had been the place of bakers, but latterly wealthy merchants had built tall, richly decorated houses here, their upper stories jutting out so far that their wives could have shaken hands out of the top story windows. Half way up the travellers passed in under an archway to a large open courtyard with galleries all round it and a cobbled paving that was tolerably clean.

'At last!' Smallpiece slid stiffly off his horse, which an ostler ran forward to hold.

After a meal the three elders wanted nothing but to nod and snore by the fire.

'Go you, Robin, and take your father's letter to Master Beckingham,' bade Parkyn, who wanted to be rid of his lively nephew as soon as possible. 'You've only to cross Cheap Side, and you'll find where Milk Street is, right opposite. Yes, Dick, you can go with him.'

Rested and refreshed by their meal, the boys were as full of curiosity as a pair of squirrels, and eager to lose no time in seeing the sights. They dodged through the horses, ostlers, and serving-men in the inn courtyard, turned to the right up the narrow street, and came into the fine handsome spaciousness of Cheap Side. Here Dick wanted to loiter and stare at the tall houses, the gay open shops with their gilded and painted signs, and the tall carved conduits like stone towers whence citizens drew their water. But

Robin wanted to get rid of his letter, so they wasted no time.

But at the house of Master Beckingham they met with disappointment. The merchant was out of town, and, in those days when travel was uncertain, it was likely that he would be away some weeks.

'Poor uncle Parkyn!' exclaimed Robin as they turned away. 'Now I am afraid he will have to put up with me.'

'I'm glad,' said Dick. 'Now we can be together. Let us go and look at St. Paul's church.'

Robin, who didn't care what he saw provided it was new, nodded cheerfully.

No one could miss that great building, towering above the city, beautiful with carving, flying buttresses, and delicate little turrets, all crowned by the dominating spire. It stood wide open, and folk passed in and out, talking, chaffing, laughing, squabbling--a few kneeling in one of the side chapels in prayer, but most of them using it merely as a convenient meeting place.

The two boys knelt, to repeat a prayer--Dick with his eyes devoutly shut, but Robin glancing round at the fascinating, shifting groups--gentlemen, merchants, pages, market women, soldiers, friars, demure or laughing girls, old folk, children; passing, loitering, chatting, or resting.

So he noticed presently two men who stepped softly into the chapel to have a quiet talk. One was a burgher, soberly dressed and respectable, but with a lean, hungry-looking face, bitter mouth, and frowning, deep-set eyes; the other was a grave-faced priest.

'What do you want of me, John Lincoln?' the priest asked.

'Sir, Dr. Bell, it's said that you are to preach the Sanctuary sermon at Paul's Cross, on the Tuesday of Easter week.'

'That is so, my son,' assented Dr. Bell.

'I do beseech you'--Robin pricked his ears at the

eagerness in John Lincoln's voice—'to do a great service to this city of ours by speaking for poor, oppressed Englishmen in your sermon!'

'What do you mean?' But the priest sounded as if he had a very good idea.

'Learned doctor, so it is, as you know very well, that Englishmen, both merchants and others, are undone, for strangers have more liberty in this land than true-born Englishmen! Look there, at yon merchant of Italy, in his silks and velvets, how he swaggers even in this holy place, pushing every one aside as if he were a prince in his native Lombardy! Why, we have a very street named after them—here in our London—Lombard Street! And that fat Fleming in a fur gown—he has a hundred artificers from the Low Countries, so that our poor honest craftsmen starve——'

'Hush, Master Lincoln, speak lower.'

Lincoln controlled himself and dropped his voice, but still spoke passionately. 'I tell you, there are so many of these foreigners with their silks, their cloth of gold, their wine, their iron, that people scarce care to buy of an Englishman! Last Sunday I saw six hundred strangers shooting at the popinjay in Moorfields! It is a danger to the realm—it is bitter injustice——'

'And what would you have me do about it?' half whispered Dr. Bell.

'Why, marry, what but preach against these lazy, greedy, proud-stomached foreigners in your sermon! In so doing you shall deserve great thanks of my Lord Mayor and all true citizens.'

'I may deserve thanks—but shall I get them?' Dr. Bell smiled bitterly. 'The King's Majesty and Cardinal Wolsey are said greatly to favour the foreigners.'

'For the cardinal—a proud pompous priest——'

'Sh! That is not the way to speak——'

'Well then, leave the cardinal. But I dare swear that



His Gracious Majesty King Harry, God bless him, has no idea how his poor loyal folk are oppressed.'

'There 's danger, though, in such talk.'

'Very likely. But if someone do not speak out, we shall all be ruined. Dr. Standish, that is to preach on Monday, dare not——'

'Oh, so he is afraid, is he? The great Dr. Standish!'

'Ha ha!' Robin thought. 'I guess this Dr. Bell is jealous of Dr. Standish!'

'Yes, he is afraid!' John Lincoln leaned closer to the priest. 'What we need is a man of courage, who will speak out fearlessly—a man with a gift of words—like you, sir!'

'Caught!' Robin chuckled within himself, as Dr. Bell nodded solemnly two or three times. 'We shall have our sermon.'

'Ay—I will think it over,' Dr. Bell promised, and Lincoln instantly fished out a rather crumpled and dog's-eared paper from his wallet and pushed it into the priest's hand.

'Here, doctor, is a bill setting forth all our complaints better than my poor speech can do. I beseech you, take it and read it!'

'Well. For the sake of our poor citizens, and the good of the realm, I will speak out. Fear you not, Master Lincoln! I 'll trounce them roundly!'

'What are you staring at, Robin?' asked Dick, who had finished his prayers.

'Dickon, you must persuade your father to take us to hear Dr. Bell preach on Tuesday of Easter week!'

'Why, Robin,' said Dick, surprised, 'I never knew you so eager for sermons!'

'If I don't miss my guess, this one is going to be rare fun. Come on out of this now, and let 's see the famous Cheap Side, which every one says is so fine!'

As they went out by the north gate of St. Paul's churchyard, Robin told what he had overheard. Dick fired up excitedly.

'Good! It's time someone spoke out against these foreigners. Did you mark what pale, starved faces so many of these Londoners have? It's the Lombards and Flemings who take the bread out of their mouths, I'll lay——'

'Or maybe it's the dirt and the closeness of the houses,' remarked Robin shrewdly.

But they forgot all about the sermon once they were in Cheap Side—there was so much to look at. The handsome stone conduits whence the citizens, buckets clanking from yokes on their shoulders, drew their water; the tall carved cross with the market women guarding their baskets at its foot; the Standard Fountain, roofed in with a gilded pent-house; the gay painted shop signs swinging and creaking in the spring wind; the market stalls; and above all the open shops with their 'prentices all shouting one against the other—shops so full of a variety of goods that the country boys were fairly dazed.

They sauntered along Goldsmiths' Row, now craning their necks back to look up at the carved eaves of the houses, now wondering at the display of chains, rings, brooches, cups, dishes, and pretty trinkets, at which the goldsmiths and their apprentices were industriously working in full view of the street; and finally stopping dead to stare at the great painted sign of woodmen riding on the most weird and monstrous beasts.

Suddenly a hand came slap down on the shoulder of each, and someone pushed himself between them with a loud:

'Why, Robin! Why, Dickon! They do say that if you wait long enough in Cheap Side you sooner or later meet any one you want—but who 'd ha' thought o' meeting you here?'

'Tom!' both boys shouted together.

## CHAPTER X

### RUMBLING OF THUNDER

TOM, having been two months in London, and having used his time well, was of course able to tell his friends all about everything. Master Boulton, his father's friend, was an easy master, he said, and let him come and go much as he liked. Already he had visited most of the ironsmiths in the neighbourhood to see what their work was like.

'But it's poor, petty stuff,' said Tom, 'and mostly mending rather than making. For good ironwork men go to the Flemings.'

'There!' Dickon cried. 'That's just what we've been hearing, Tom. I think it's a shame, and the king ought to be told about it. But there's going to be a sermon preached on Tuesday by—what was the name, Robin?'

'Dr. Bell,' Robin supplied.

'Ho!' cried Tom. 'Dr. Bell, canon of St. Paul's? He's got ambitions, that one. But how did you know?'

Robin told him what he had overheard. 'And I think it would be a rare sport to hear that sermon,' he added.

'And I think it's time someone took the part of poor English craftsmen,' said Dick warmly.

'Why, about that'—Tom screwed up his face—'seems to me if the poor English craftsmen—and specially the 'prentices—paid a bit more heed to their craft and a little less to playing slip-groat and bucklers, they could very well beat the foreigners at their own game. For why? Folks buy of the Flemings because their work is better, that's all. I'd be shamed to turn out such flippy stuff as these London smiths. Nay, the best ironwork is the south-country work. You should see them stare when I set to it! They don't love me very greatly,' he added with a wry grin.

'If you 're on the side of the foreigners, Tom,' Robin began hotly, but Tom took him by the arm and shook him good-naturedly.

'Now don't be in too great a hurry! Always look at both sides of a casting afore you judge. I'm not denying that the foreigners—and most especially the Italians—are haughty and insolent above everything. Why, what d' ye think of this? There was one Francis de Bard, a Lombard, stole away a citizen's wife—and a case of silver plate to boot! And when the matter was brought up at the Guild-hall, a had the impudence to arrest the good citizen for debt!'

'What for?' asked Dickon.

'Why, for lodging of his wife! Did you ever hear the like? And after, he was boasting of it in the King's Gallery at Greenwich, along with some of his cronies and some Englishmen. And one William Bolt, a merchant, says to him: "Well, you Lombards, you rejoice now, but by the mass, we will one day have a fling at you, come what will."'

'How did you come to know all this?' Robin asked.

'Why, d' ye see, Master Rastell has been a very good friend to me.'

'Master Rastell? Who 's he?' asked Dick and Robin together. Naturally, not having seen Tom for several months, they had not heard of this new acquaintance.

'Why, we met him first when a was visiting Sir Edmund Bray. He 's interested in guns! I'll tell you of that later. But my father looked him up when we came to London, and told him I 'd be here for a month or two, and if he had any orders he could let me know about it. And Mus' Rastell bids me come to his house whenever I 'd a mind; which I 'd sooner do than lose my money at dice with the other 'prentices. Well, at Mus' Rastell's house you hear all manner of talk, for he 's a printer of learned books. And he 's married to the sister of Thomas More.'

'Oh,' said Dick, interested at once. 'I'd like to know this Master Rastell. What like is he?'

Tom considered. 'Why, he's a merry man, and can set you in a roar with his quips. And he's a learned man, and can talk French and Latin as if he were born to it. But yet I think he's something of a dreamer.'

'How d' you mean?' asked Dick.

'Why, he often forgets to charge for the work he does—specially if the writer is a poor man.'

'Why, that's kind,' said Dick.

'Kind he is, for sure. But it's not good business! And then he's for ever talking of some land across the sea where everything goes much better than here. He thinks it may be beyond the New Found Land, and that's why he's so set on sailing there.'

'What, to the land Master Cabot found?' Robin was all agog.

'Yes, that very land. He's bargaining now for a couple of ships, and means to go there this very summer. That's how he comes to be interested in guns, as I told you just now. My father hopes he'll give him the order for them. Well, if we do it for him, he'll have at least that much honest work, however others cheat him.'

'Do they cheat him? What a shame, and he such a kind man!' exclaimed Robin.

'He's too trusting, that's what. He's put all in the hands of one John Ravyn—and a greedy Raven he is! I'm sure he charges double for everything he buys to fit out the ships.'

'Can't you warn Master Rastell?' said Dick.

'Who, I? A 'prentice lad—who'd heed me? No, I can do naught but help my father cast him honest culverins when the time comes. But—look here, Robin and Dick, where are you lodging?'

'At the "Bull" in Bread Street.'

'Why,' cried Tom, 'of all the luck! That's where Mus'

Rastell lives, close by the Mermaid Tavern. I'll be there to-morrow evening. I'll tell him there's a young scholar up from the country'—he clapped Dick on the back—'who wants to look into the mysteries of printing, and I'll lay he'll let you look round his workshop. And you, too, Robin, if you've a mind and nothing better to do. And now I must go, for Master Bolton has an order for a set of hinges for a church door—and he's letting me try my hand at them. Right pretty work it is, too. Good-bye, lads! Be careful who ye talk to, for London's a wicked city!'

Dick and Robin thought that they, too, had better get back and break the news to Master Parkyn that he would be saddled with his nephew for some time yet. As Robin had expected, there was a good deal of grumbling at the prospect, but he promised meekly to behave himself and not run into mischief. His uncle plainly was not very hopeful about that!

Next day—after an unquiet night, for the fleas which infested their straw pallets seemed to welcome a taste of fresh country blood—the three merchants went about their several businesses, and the boys were left to their own devices. They explored London within the walls from east to west—staring up with awe at the frowning ramparts of the Tower, where the helmets of the guards passed to and fro and the round muzzles of mounted guns gaped threateningly over the city; ran down the steep slope to the river, and watched a reckless boatload of young gentlemen risk their lives by 'shooting' their boat under the narrow arches of London Bridge; saw a Venetian carrack, sails furled, towed lumberingly to a wharf, and the porters swarm aboard her to unload. Then, greatly daring, Dick hired a boat to row them up river as far as White Friars, past the busy Steelyard, frowning Baynard's Castle, and the green garden of Black Friars' convent where the Fleet River emptied its dirty waters into the Thames. Here

they paid off the boatman and landed, to climb up Ludgate Hill, mount the walls, and look across the valley to the steep slope of Holborn Hill, and the road that followed the curve of the river to the village of Charing. A wooden gatehouse with posts and chains across the way divided Fleet Street from the Strand. This was Temple Bar, so called because it was placed just above the Temple Courts. It was merely a toll gate marking the city 'liberties'—the handsome stone arch was not yet built.

'It's better without the walls than within,' said Dick. 'Look at those gardens with the pear-trees all in blossom! I wonder which of those fine buildings are the Inns where the lawyers live? ,'

'Hallo!' exclaimed Robin, looking down. 'What's that crowd below?'

A cart came lumbering out of Newgate, followed by a jeering crowd. Tied to it—dragged along with a rope round his neck, his hands bound behind him, stumbled a man stripped naked to the waist. His bare back was already striped with weals from the lash which a fellow walking beside him every now and again laid lustily across the wretch's shoulders.

'It's only a thief being whipped to Tyburn Tree, where they'll hang 'em on the gibbet,' remarked a citizen who was lounging against the curtain wall. 'One rascal the less! though they breed so fast you can't hang 'em fast enough.'

It was too common a sight to move a London dweller to any particular feeling, but the country boys turned away feeling a little sick. The pillory and the stocks they took as a matter of course, like the ducking-stool for scolding wives; and an occasional hanging was nothing to make a fuss about. But that long agonizing trudge with death at the end of it revolted them, Dick especially.

'Oh, Robin!' he gasped, 'come away!' and turned, white-faced, to go down the steps.

'Don't take it to heart so!' Robin put an arm about him. 'Likely he deserved it.'

'He was quite young—not much older than you or me,' said Dick, shivering. 'Robin—suppose one were very hungry, and stole some food—or suppose one fell into some trouble with the law——'

'Nonsense!' cried Robin briskly. 'It seems harsh, I grant you. But how ever else would you keep honest men safe if you didn't hang thieves and rascals? Innocent folk don't need to fear the law.'

'I hope not.' Dick sounded doubtful.

They were to find out a good deal about London justice before long.

They were very much cheered, however, on coming down into Newgate Street to meet a gay company, handsomely dressed, riding out to Smithfield to practise tilting. The boys squeezed themselves against the wall to let the party go by, but at that Robin narrowly escaped having his hat torn off by the gilded spur of one of the gallants. It must have been a good-natured youth, however, for with a laugh he tossed a gold noble in Robin's direction as a sort of apology. Very much cheered by the incident, the boys pranced off to Cheap Side to lay out their booty. Robin bought embroidered gloves for his mother and sister, and spent the rest of the money at a pastry-cook's where he insisted on treating Dick to hot pies and marchpane.

It may have been as a result of this feast that next day Dick was languid and heavy-eyed, and not inclined to go far afield. What he wanted was to spend a quiet morning among the bookshops of Paternoster Row.

'But don't you come with me,' he told Robin. 'You 'll only bore yourself.'

Robin confessed that he was not much thrilled by the notion of looking at books. He was wondering how best to amuse himself, when the landlord of the 'Bull'—a red-faced, hoarse-voiced, but friendly person—suggested that,



as his son George was taking his bow out for practice to the butts at Islington, Robin might like to go with him. Robin jumped at the idea, and ran to fetch his own bow, which he had brought with him as a matter of course.

So it came about that Robin and Dick each had their separate adventures that day.

Dick wandered through St. Paul's churchyard, which was like a small town in itself. There was the Bishop's Palace, with its gardens, kitchen, slaughter-house, brew-house, and other buildings belonging to a great establishment. There was the Preaching Cross, where on high days sermons were preached in the open air, and where sometimes a wandering friar would hold forth to busy and inattentive people on their sins. There was also a building which attracted Dick's attention because it was newer than the rest.

As he stood gazing, the sight of a number of little boys running out of it, leaping and shouting in the joy of release, told him that this must be Dean Colet's new school. Rather ruefully he compared it in his mind with the dark little Guildford schoolhouse, and wished that the worthy burgesses of Guildford would hurry up and build the new school with the money left them in Robert Becket's will! After the boys paced a pleasant-faced young man in sober black, plainly a junior schoolmaster. He noticed Dick staring, and spoke to him in friendly fashion.

'Well, lad, what do you think of our new school?'

'I thought it must be new,' said Dick. 'What a great lot of scholars you have! In Guildford we have only twenty-four.'

'Here we have one hundred and fifty and three,' the young master told him proudly. 'The same number as the fishes in St. Peter's miraculous draught! Are you a scholar, lad?'

'I have only a little learning, but a great love of it,' Dick answered in Latin, and the rest of the talk went on in that language.

'Ah, I see that you have had a good teacher. Do you also know Greek?'

'But little,' Dick answered ruefully. 'Brother Geoffrey had small Greek, though he always wished to know more.'

'Here we teach Greek as well as Latin, by order of Dr. John Colet, who built the school five years ago. There is nothing old-fashioned about us! In fact,' added the young man, with a smile that made him look jolly and boyish, 'Dr. Colet has had some trouble with the bishops because he won't have teaching on the dull old lines! We masters are not monks and priests, but laymen—and that 's a new thing, too.'

'I liked my school, and Brother Geoffrey is a good teacher,' said Dick loyally. 'And as soon as Master Beckingham's will has been settled, we are going to have a new school too. I hope it will be like this one.'

'And you—what are you going to do, my young scholar?'

'Oh, I'm to go to Oxford as soon as my father can enter me. After that—I suppose I must either go into the Church or be a lawyer.'

'Don't do either,' advised the young master earnestly. 'Study all you can at Oxford (I was there myself and so was Dr. Colet and the High Master of this school, Dr. Lily) and then go back to Guildford and take the new learning to your school there! There 's a great day dawning for England, I tell you, with our brave young king, who 's a scholar himself, and all our learned and witty men who are his friends. It 's good to be alive and young in these days, with the horrible civil wars of York and Lancaster over and done with, and everywhere men's minds freeing themselves—new knowledge—new discoveries of strange lands—ah, wonderful days!'

The young schoolmaster looked quite flushed and excited, and Dick coloured up too.

'I 'll remember what you say, sir!' he exclaimed.

Just then the great bell of St. Mary-le-Bow pealed out midday.

'I must go get my dinner,' said the young schoolmaster, 'or these imps of mine will be back before I have done. Fare you well, young scholar! But come and see me if you can, and I'll try out your Greek for you.' And off he went at a great pace.

Dick wandered on in a sort of dream. He had a new idea in his head now, and the more he thought of it the more he liked it. He wished he had Robin or Tom with him, to talk it over. Then, coming out of Paul's Alley, he found himself in Paternoster Row and had something else to think about.

But the books proved rather disappointing, for they were nearly all either Latin prayers—which he already knew by heart—or dull old-fashioned sermons, often in very bad Latin, by ancient scholars dead and gone. After browsing along for some time, glancing at first one and then another, Dick was about to give it up and go away, when at the extreme corner, as if about to escape from all this fustiness, he came upon a little bookshop which looked different. There were fewer musty-looking tomes laid out on the counter; and among them several books that seemed fresh and new as if just from the printer's hands. Dick picked one up and looked at the title-page. *Utopia*—what a strange word! By Thomas More—surely he had heard that name somewhere? Why, of course, he was the friend of the great Erasmus—the honest lawyer Richard Beckett had spoken of. So he had written a book—all in Latin, too. Dick turned the pages. Hallo—this looked interesting! It seemed to be about a mysterious traveller called Raphael Hythloday (what a fascinating name!) who had been on a voyage to that new land they were beginning to call America. This would interest Robin. Hm! Hythloday had some pretty sharp things to say about the way things were managed in Europe. Dick

read on and on, chuckling sometimes, at other times frowning a little over difficult passages, until suddenly the bookseller's hand came down smartly on his shoulder and made him jump.

'Hi, youngster! You seem to be getting a good meal of reading, free gratis for nothing! What d' you suppose I keep a bookshop for? Either buy, or leave my wares alone!'

Dick fumbled in his wallet but found nothing there but two testers and a groat—not nearly enough to buy a fine new book. He turned away, feeling ruffled and uncomfortable and very near to crying—and ran up against a slender middle-sized man with one shoulder higher than the other, who took him by the arm and looked at him amusedly.

'Come, come, Master Simkin! Why so sharp? The lad's no beggarly scholar, by his dress. Now, he might have gone to his father, who, I judge, is some worthy merchant, and begged of him the price of my little book here. So you and I were both the gainers. But now your angry words have vexed him, and here's a good customer lost.'

'Oh!' gasped Dick, looking up at the thin face that was all covered with a network of laughter lines, 'are you—are you Master Thomas More?'

The man took off his flat cap and bowed, in a sort of laughing way that was not in the least mocking.

'Thomas More, a poor scholar, at your service'

'Master Thomas More, Under-Sheriff of the City of London!' said Simkin the bookseller, in the same breath.

'Oh, sir,' stammered Dick, 'I thought I wanted most to meet Dr. Erasmus, but now I've seen your book, I think there's nobody in London I wanted to meet more than you.'

'Flattery, flattery!' cried More gaily. 'And a hint of treason, too. Surely you wish most to see the King's Majesty—or the great cardinal in his scarlet robes—'

'By your leave!' Dick twinkled, already feeling perfectly at home with this delightful person, however great he might be. 'I said meet, not see.'

'Well countered, boy,' More laughed. And so you like my *Utopia*?' .

'I've only read a little, sir, and I don't understand it all. But I love it! What does the name mean?'

'Why, it's Greek for nowhere.'

Dick's face fell. 'Oh, there isn't really such a place? I thought it was all true—that Hythloday was a real person. He seems so real, sir!'

'Maybe there is truth in it! Someone may find Utopia one day. Though I must regrettably forgot to ask Master Hythloday what part of the world it was situated in, so I can't direct you. What's your name, my little scholar? And where do you come from? You haven't the London speech.'

Dick explained himself, and More fired quick questions at him, lawyer fashion, until Dick thought that there must be very little this man could not find out if he chose. At the end of the catechism More picked up the copy of *Utopia*.

'Ink and a quill, Master Simkin—and charge this copy to my account.' He wrote on the fly-leaf, in a fine, clear Italian hand, 'To Master Richard Parkyn, from his friend and well-wisher, Thomas More. May he find his Utopia.' Then off he went, with his odd scholar's stoop, leaving Dick breathlessly hugging his treasure book.

'There now, young master, there's a singular honour for ye! And yet that's just like Master More! With the highest and the lowest, gentle and simple, he's just the same—so they be honest. He cannot abide a rogue, nor an oppressor. I would he were Chancellor of England 'stead of that proud priest Wolsey!'

Which he was to be, and Sir Thomas More to boot, not many years ahead; though nobody guessed it yet.

Meanwhile, Robin was making his way, with George, the innkeeper's son, out of Aldersgate and along the bridle-path to Islington village. The way had only just become passable after the winter's mud, and many folk of all sorts had taken advantage of the fine day to get their first sport of the year. There rode a party of ladies and gentlemen, hawk on fist. Here a huntsman strained at a leash of hounds, as eager as their master to start a hare. Yonder marched a party of young men with crossbows over their shoulders, exchanging rude remarks with a couple of soldiers carrying those newfangled guns called arquebuses—which, said the crossbow men, were as likely to blow up their owners as hit the mark! Robin himself carried the old-fashioned long-bow, quite untroubled by the mockery of George, a youth of sixteen who rather fancied himself. Finding that he could not provoke Robin, George began to show off his knowledge.

'You'll see enough great folk at Islington, likely, to set your mouth agape for ever, bumpkin,' he said loftily. 'The Earl of Warwick has a manor at Stoke Newington, near by, and the Earl of Northumberland a house at Newington Green——'

'And the Earl of Cumberland holds Shalford, near Guildford,' countered Robin. 'What of it? These great men have lands everywhere. But how often do they visit them?'

'That's too true,' said George, forgetting his pose for a moment. 'They let their bailiffs do as they like—for instance, spoiling our sporting grounds at Islington by enclosing fields with hedges so that one can't get a fair shot. How are we to obey His Majesty's command and practise our shooting if they take away our open fields? It don't matter for the gentry—they ride where they like. But the 'prentice boys and serving-men that shoot at the butts are right angry, and something'll come out of it afore long—here we are, and look. See how we be cramped in!'

There certainly was not much space, and the field where the archery butts were set up was so crowded that the onlookers were in some danger of getting shot. As the archers loosed their shafts they yelled 'Fast!' much as golfers to-day shout 'Fore!' and then it was up to every one to get out of the way as best he could.

Robin and George had to wait for some time for their turn, hopping about to keep themselves warm. At last they got their chance. George wound up his crossbow with an air, let fly, and missed. Robin kept his face straight.

'Very likely it was the wind,' he remarked as he stepped up to the mark; he hoped, for the honour of Surrey, that he would make a good showing, but felt a little doubtful. He had a new bow, a size larger than the one he was used to, and had not proved it yet. However, he fitted the arrow to the string, braced himself, shouted 'Fast!' and loosed it. To his intense astonishment it struck quivering in the inner ring, almost on the bull's eye.

Someone remarked, 'Well shot, younker!' but that was all the praise he got, for just then a confused shouting and trampling made every one turn to see what was coming up. Then a sentence, repeated over and over, came clear:

'Shovels and spades! Shovels and spades!'

'That's a new cry—mostly it's "'Prentices and clubs!'"', remarked George. 'What's afoot?'

A mob of young men was marching up to the fields, led by an extraordinary figure in jester's motley, dancing and prancing and waving a spade. Each youth carried a spade or mattock over his shoulder.

'Shovels and spades! Shovels and spades!' they shouted, and flung themselves on the hedge that cut up the archery field, digging, grubbing, and wrenching up the stakes.

'Hurrah!' George shouted. 'It's Tom the Turner—he swore he would tear down their hedge afore he was much older! Shovels and spades! Shovels and spades!'

Many of the lookers-on took up the cry, and snatching up anything handy attacked the hated hedge or shovelled earth into the dykes. Some ran across the fields to neighbouring farms, seizing any tools they came across without a 'by your leave,' and came careering back to join in the fun. Robin, slinging his bow on his back, found a pointed stake and dug and tore with a will, getting his hose well muddied and his jacket torn, and enjoying himself mightily.

My Lord of Warwick's bailiff came riding furiously up, demanding to know what all this was about. Tom Turner, his jester's garb all bespattered, thumbed his nose and wriggled his fingers at him rudely.

'Tis the citizens of London claiming their rights,' he said, 'and what are you going to do about it, copper-face?'

'Ah, them as does poor folk out o' their rights is going to find themselves in a hot place some day,' said a voice that Robin thought he knew, 'and maybe sooner than some folks think. Watch out for Tuesday of Easter week—we're a-going to hear somewhat.'

Robin looked up sharply. Yes, there was no mistaking—it was Peter Coo again. He was making a great display of hard work, but Robin noticed that there was no sweat on his face.

'What about Tuesday of Easter week?' asked George.

'Why'—Robin was not sorry to be able to score a little off his know-all companion—'Dr. Bell of St. Paul's is to preach a sermon against the foreigners at Paul's Cross.'

'And how do you know that?' George demanded, but Robin only laughed.

'Ask Master John Lincoln,' he advised.

A moment later he was sorry he had spoken, for Peter Coo, hearing his voice, turned round and fixed on him a very ugly look. Then he made off and disappeared in the crowd.

In an hour or two every hedge was down and every ditch was levelled, and the archers' field restored to its



proper size. Happy, hot, and dirty, the crowd surged home, much larger than when it came out, for most of those already there, Robin and George among them, had joined them.

'Will there be trouble over this, d' ye think?' Robin asked. George sniffed.

'You don't know the London 'prentices, it's plain. I tell you, the Lord Mayor himself is afraid of them. When they're roused they're something frightful—and this time they've been roused good and proper. There'll be no more dykes and hedges around Islington fields.'

Robin had thoroughly enjoyed himself, but, looking at the excited mob of youngsters, he thought that there *was* something a little terrifying about them. Suppose they were really angry, instead of half in fun like to-day! He wished he hadn't mentioned Dr. Bell's sermon. And he couldn't forget Peter Coo's face.



A CITIZEN'S WIFE

## CHAPTER XI

### GATHERING STORM

'A GOOD round sermon as ever I heard,' said Master Norbrigge.

'Dangerous! Dangerous!' Master Smallpiece quavered. 'There 's an ugly temper about. Did you mark how the people growled and muttered?'

'These foreigners need to be put in their places,' Master Norbrigge insisted. 'Master Parkyn, don't you agree with me?'

'Why, it 's very true,' said Parkyn, 'that London seems overfull of Italians and Dutchmen——'

'One shouldered me into the gutter the other day,' muttered Norbrigge.

'But yet,' Parkyn went on, 'we don't want any riots—London 'prentices and small craftsmen are proud-stomached above any thing *I* ever saw——'

'I wish my business were finished, and I could get back to Guildford,' muttered Smallpiece, 'where 'prentices know their places and merchants are all honest Englishmen.'

They were walking under London Wall towards Moor-gate, with the idea of getting out into the pleasant fields for a breath of air after the service. Robin and Dick walked demurely behind their elders, Dick very conscious of a new blue coat with wide sleeves slashed with orange, and a flat blue velvet cap with a curly yellow feather in it, a present from his father; and Robin admiring the broad-toed shoes, cut to show the scarlet lining, on which he had spent one of the gold pieces his mother had tucked into his purse before he left. It is to be feared that neither of them had paid much heed, after the first few minutes, to Dr. Bell's thundering sermon.

It was pleasant out in the open fields where the wild sloe

blossomed and the citizens of London, in their best clothes—for was it not Easter week?—walked with their wives, children ran and played, and young men raced, wrestled, or kicked a football about without any of the rules we know to-day.

'Oh, look!' exclaimed Dick. 'There goes Master Thomas More, and Master John Rastell with him!'

'And his family!' said Robin. 'What a lot of girls. I say! There's Tom, with little Will Rastell on his shoulders.'

'They say,' remarked Dick, 'that Master More's eldest daughter is the most learned lady in England.'

'I have no use for learned women,' sniffed Robin with his nose in the air. 'Anyway, she's only a little girl, and she doesn't look very learned. Who's the dame in scarlet, with the nose?'

'Mistress More, I suppose,' Dick answered. '*She* isn't handsome, is she? But she isn't the mother of those children, you know. She's Master More's second wife.' Dick had made it his business to find out all he could about his hero.

'Tom's waving to us—let's join him,' suggested Robin, and the boys raced over to join their friend.

Very much to Robin's surprise—for he did not think so great a man as the Under-Sheriff of London would remember a chance-met boy—Thomas More looked up, saw Dick and smiled a welcome that wrinkled the laughter lines about his eyes.

'Why, here's my little scholar,' he cried. 'Meg—Bess—here's the lad who admires your poor father's *Utopia*.'

The little girls, who had been hanging on their father's arms, curtsied with a rustle of their gay silks, and Dick pulled off his cap rather shyly. They did not look terrifyingly learned, and they plainly adored their clever father.

'Come, introduce me to your handsome friend,' said More. 'I always liked chestnuts—eh, Meg?' Robin,

blushing at this allusion to his ruddy head, made his best bow. 'Is he a scholar too?'

'Not me, sir!' Robin laughed. 'I'm only a 'prentice.'

'Prentices have become Lord Mayors before now,' More chaffed him. 'Witness Sir Richard Whittington.'

'Robin's not likely to become Lord Mayor, nor even Mayor of Guildford town,' said Tom, with that bold freedom of speech he got from his father, 'he's not careful enough of money. Whittington only sent his cat to sea, but Robin would go himself, eh, Robin?'

'That I would!' averred Robin stoutly, and at that John Rastell turned to look at him.

'Why then, he's after my own heart! He shall sail as my cabin boy on the *Barbara*, when I go to seek Utopia.'

'I only wish I could,' said Robin dolefully. 'But I'm 'prenticed to my uncle, and it would cost my father too much to break my articles.'

'Tilly-vally!' cried Mistress More. 'I wonder at you, Master Rastell, I do indeed, putting wild notions into a boy's head. It's enough for you to plan a wild-geese chase, instead of staying at home and minding your printing, and no good will come of your silly venture, mark my words! What have you to do with the sea? Stay safe on dry land and be thankful.'

Here Thomas More noticed Master Parkyn, who with his two friends was hovering in the background, overjoyed at the chance of making himself known to the famous lawyer. He had been very indignant when Richard Becketingham refused to give him a letter of introduction, saying he did not know More well enough to take the liberty; but here was his chance through his own son!

'Come, Dick, Dick, where's your manners! Present me, boy, present me,' he puffed.

Dick had no choice, though he saw by the change that came over More's face that he was happier laughing with young folks than talking business with grave elders.

Mistress More tossed her head in a way that said plainly, 'See what comes of making friends with all and sundry.' But she only said, rather tartly, when the introductions were over:

'Master More, please to remember that your dinner waits you. I must away home to see that those girls haven't spoiled it; come, Meg, come, Bess, I want your help. Cecily, take little John's hand.'

She sailed off with her flock, and Tom, setting down young Will, beckoned to his friends.

'Were you at the sermon?' he asked. 'Was it a good rousing one?'

'Oh, he trounced the foreigners roundly,' said Robin. 'What do you think about it, Tom?'

'I think there 'll be trouble soon, but it 's no business of ours,' Tom answered, little dreaming how deeply they would all be mixed up in it. 'But come along, our respected elders are all deep in talk, and I want to show you the great Maypole. You never saw anything like it!'

They went back through the city gate and into Leadenhall Street. There, by St. Andrew's church, hung an immense shaft, a pine trunk, supported by iron stanchions.

'When it 's set up it 's high above the church spire,' Tom explained, 'so they call the church St. Andrew's Under-shaft. Will you be here for May Day, do you think? There 'll be great doings—it 'll be worth seeing.'

'I expect we shall.' Dick and Robin stared open-mouthed.

'Indeed, there will be something worth seeing on May Day of this year,' said a harsh voice behind them, and they turned with a start. A man stood looking at the Maypole with burning eyes and a twisted mouth. Robin, with an uncomfortable shiver, recognized him as John Lincoln, whom he had seen talking to Dr. Bell in St. Paul's.

'What do you mean?' asked Tom coldly, but Lincoln only shrugged his shoulders and laughed uglyly.

'You 'll see, you geese from the country,' he sneered and turned away.

'That 's the one that pricked on Dr. Bell to preach,' Robin told Tom. 'I thought it fun at the time, but now I 'm not so sure.'

'I don't like his face,' said Dick. 'He 's a bitter-looking fellow.'

'I 'll lay he 's let some foreigner get the better of him, and means to pay his grudge,' grinned Tom. 'But it 'll be a shame if he spoils the May Day revels.'

May Day! May Day! It was queer how at every turn, in the days that followed, one heard that word whispered or muttered. No one knew, or no one would tell, what was going to happen, but everybody was quite sure that something was afoot, and that it concerned the foreigners.

Master Parkyn and his friends, thoroughly alarmed, tried to hurry on their preparations so as to get away to the quiet and safety of Guildford before the storm broke; but it was difficult to do business with all these rumours flying about.

And there was the question of Dick. Would it be better to risk danger from the owlers in Surrey, or to remain in London and face what might be a serious riot? Besides, young Master Martyn of Paul's School had taken a fancy to him, and was reading Greek with him regularly.

'He has a chance of making friends in London who will stand him in good stead,' Master Parkyn debated the matter with his friends. 'This Master More too—he was cold to me, but asked Dick to come to his house one day and talk to his daughters. There 's a man worth knowing! But if I stay in London I can do no business, and my expenses—I shall be sorely out of pocket.'

'So shall we all,' said Master Norbrigge sourly. 'Thieves and robbers, these keepers of London inns. Well, make your mind up, Master Parkyn. As for me, I am for going

back to Guildford before this first of May that promises to be so stormy.'

'And I too,' declared little Master Smallpiece.

'Then I'll have to come, for I cannot travel alone!' Master Parkyn twisted his hands. 'Yet it do seem a pity when all prospects look so bright for the lad——'

It was John Rastell the printer who came to the rescue. He had taken a great liking for all the three boys, and when he heard of the dilemma he offered to take both Dick and Robin into his household for a month or two. His wife, Elizabeth, who was sister to Thomas More, said that she would willingly mend their hose for them and see to their linen. As for any danger, even if there were disturbances, Rastell pooh-poohed it.

'My household shall keep within doors o' May Day, if there looks to be anything more than the usual randy-dandy,' he assured Master Parkyn. 'Myself, I don't think it. There's been too much talk beforehand, and my Lord Mayor and his council will have taken measures, be sure of it.'

Dick and Robin clutched one another and almost choked with excitement. But a cold douche promptly fell on their hopes.

'Well—it is right handsome of you, Master Rastell, to make the offer,' said Master Parkyn, 'and I accept it gladly for Dick. It's very greatly to his advantage. But not Robin. There's no call for *him* to stay—he'll only idle away his time.'

'But father!' Dick cried, 'isn't Robin in greater danger from the owlers than I should be?'

'Not if he minds his work and stays close in Guildford town,' said Master Parkyn, rather inconsistently. 'Now don't gainsay me, Dickon, your cousin is my 'prentice after all, and he's got to learn his trade like any other. You'll not be wasting your time by staying in London, but Robin will.'

There was no answer to this, and the boys knew it. There really was very little risk that Robin would fall in with owlers if he took common-sense precautions; and there was no work for him in London. But the prospect of being left alone spoiled nearly all Dick's pleasure, and as for Robin, he was inwardly furious. If there was going to be a row, he wanted to see it! And if not, he would miss all the fun and excitement of May Day in London—the great Maypole, the shops all wreathed in greenery, the stalls with free food all along Cheap Side, and the merrymaking in the streets. It was just too bad!

But his uncle was firm. Back he must go—he had been idle long enough. Playing about the streets was no way to succeed in life, and Robin had got to learn what business meant, so no pulling a doleful face!

Master Parkyn, in fact, was in a thoroughly bad temper. His trip to London had been a failure, no one was inclined to do business, and Master More, that famous lawyer, instead of giving him some good tips on how to win his case over the matter of that land at Stoughton, told him roundly that he had better leave it alone and stick to his clothmaking.

'I had prepared him a handsome present, too,' lamented Master Parkyn. 'A fine embroidered purse with ten gold pieces in it! And what does he do but thank me for the purse, which he says he'll keep in remembrance of me, and hand me in exchange a pair of gloves with my gold pieces stuffed into the fingers—one in each!'

Master Norbrigge broke into a roar of laughter and said that Parkyn was well served for trying to bribe Master More.

The party was to leave for Guildford on the morning of May Day Eve, and as the time drew on Robin was distressed to see Dick looking more and more miserable.

'Why, what cheer, Dickon!' he rallied his friend, 'you've made good friends here. You wouldn't care to leave



Master Martyn now, and you getting on so well with your Greek! And the young folks of Master More's household—I'd have thought they'd ha' been just to your taste, being so learned.'

'They're mostly girls,' objected Dick, 'though I'll not deny they're merry and witty. And of course, there's young Will Roper, and John Clements; but he's so much older than I am. Besides, I don't know them very well, and there are so many, my head gets dazed.'

Indeed, the number of youngsters who practically made More's house their own was a thing to wonder at!

'Well, Tom's in London,' Robin went on with his consolation.

'I'm glad of old Tom,' said Dick, 'but he's here, there, and everywhere in these days. Robin, I'll miss you horribly.'

All this made Robin still more unwilling to leave. He understood Dick better than Tom did—in fact, he stood, as it were, midway between Tom's practical common sense and Dick's dreaminess. Tom, independent and old for his age, was sometimes inclined to be hard on Dick. However, the day before they were to go south, Robin sought out his other friend and begged him to see as much of Dick as possible.

'Oh, Dickon will be all right among his learned friends,' Tom declared. 'I'll see him as oft as I can, but o' May Day I've promised to mind the shop for Master Bolton—he can't trust any of his 'prentices if there's trouble.'

'Master Rastell thinks it'll all come to naught,' said Robin.

'Mus' Rastell don't know what's talked of in the shops and work rooms,' Tom told him. 'Trouble there will be, you mark my words—for the foreigners, and for any silly fools who think to get their revenge on 'em. I shall keep well out of it, for my part.'

'Then,' cried Robin, 'Dick ought not to be left alone.'

'But he won't be alone, ye ninny,' Tom argued. 'He'll be safer wi' Mus' Rastell than at the Bull Inn. Don't you fret, though, Robin, I'll go look him up after you're gone on May Day Eve. I'm middlin' sorry you're off, lad, myself.'

Robin let fly at that, and told Tom exactly what he felt about it. He could speak more freely than to Dick—after all, Master Parkyn was Dick's father!

He was still seething early next morning, when the baggage was piled on to the pack ponies, and, with a good deal of bustle, clatter, and shouting—not to speak of grousing from the landlord, who considered he had been cheated—the Guildford folk rode out of the 'nn courtyard. Dick's traps had already been sent roun' to Master Rastell's house, and he bade his father and friend good-bye at the gateway with such a white face—though he pinned a smile to it bravely—as stuck in Robin's mind and would not be got rid of.

The streets leading to London Bridge were more crowded even than on the day they arrived. A great number of nervous citizens were bent on getting out of London until the threatened riots should be over—for once the 'prentices of London were up they might not discriminate between the property of foreigners and that of Englishmen! Many Dutchmen and Italians had already shut up their businesses and fled into the country.

There were crowds, too, of rough-looking fellows, always glad of a row, who thronged the streets and jeered, throwing mud, dead cats, and rotten vegetables at any one who looked like a foreigner, whether he were one or not. Master Norbrige, being large and stout, would pass very well for a Dutchman, and got his share of the spattering!

At the entrance to London Bridge there was a complete jam, and the party had to sit on their horses, fuming and fidgeting, while an Italian goldsmith in front argued, pleaded, swore, and bribed a boatman to take him and his family up the river.

Robin was at the tail of his convoy, and presently found himself separated from the rest by a farm cart loaded with vegetables, which insisted on pushing its way right athwart the stream of traffic. There were no policemen in those days to regulate things! An old woman with a basket of eggs and butter had the unlucky idea of trying to follow at the cart's tail. The cart-horse, annoyed by the shouting and shoving, suddenly stood still, the cart slid back a little and caught the old dame on the shoulder, so that she sat down flat, spilling her wares in all directions. This was pure joy to the mob of ragged rascally boys who swarmed in the narrow filthy lanes of the riverside, and who at once began to snatch up such eggs as were not already broken and shy them at everybody and everything in sight. The poor old woman lifted up her voice and mingled curses on the boys and the cart with wails at her loss.

Down sprang Robin in a red-headed rage, flew at the boys like a young catamountain, and cuffed them so severely and unexpectedly that they fell back for a moment. In that moment Robin got the dame on to her feet—and, of course, found himself the centre of a grand battle. It would have gone hard with him if one or two of the more decent folk, seeing what had happened, had not come to his rescue. By the time the boys had been kicked and beaten out of the way, Robin, torn, dishevelled, and breathless, had quite lost sight of his friends—and his pony had vanished too!

It was quite hopeless, he felt, to think of trying to catch them up in that crowd.

'If they don't care enough to wait for me,' he told himself, 'I shan't trouble to look for them! If they want me, they can send for me.' And deliberately he turned his back on the river and began to make his way toward Master Rastell's house in Friday Street.

He felt extremely cheerful! There would probably be a

blazing row when his uncle discovered what had happened, but did Robin care? Not he. He had enjoyed his little scrap, he was going back to Dick, he was going to be on the spot for whatever excitement might blow up the next day. And at the moment he was completely his own master. He stopped at a pastrycook's to buy a spiced cake, for they had broken their fast at daybreak, and it was now, after all the delays, close on nine in the morning. As he sauntered along, munching his cake, he thought how queer the city seemed to-day. Half the shops—all those with anything valuable to sell—were closely shuttered. There was much less traffic than usual in the side streets, but under the quietness ran a curious hum, a continual muttering of voices quite unlike the cheerful shouts and raucous bargaining that he had grown used to. It was as though London waited for something, half frightened, half excited. Little knots of men stood about talking, and there were very few women to be seen. Hardly any one seemed to be doing any work.

When he reached Rastell's house, the thud of the printing press was silent, and a couple of 'prentices were playing pitch-and-toss on the doorstep. They looked up in surprise as Robin greeted them.

'Why, it's Robin Polstead o' Guildford,' said one. 'Thought you and your folk had run away to your burrows.'

'You been at fisticuffs, by the look of it. Did your uncle beat you?' jeered the other.

'No, but I'd beat *you*, if I weren't busy,' Robin answered cheerfully. 'Where's Dick Parkyn? Is he within?'

'Dick Parkyn? Why, he went out a while since—some 'un called for him.'

'Was that Tom Elrington?' Robin was a little surprised, remembering what Tom had said.

'No—'twasn't Tom. Dunno who it was.'

Robin, he did not know why, felt suddenly uneasy.

'Where did he go, d' you know?' he asked.

'Said Master More was asking for him,' was the answer, and the two boys returned to their game, ignoring Robin.

Well, that explained it, though that Master More should be wanting Dick at that time of day, was curious. The Under-Sheriff would surely be fully occupied!

Well, the best thing to do was to go and meet Dick and find out his news. Robin turned away and trotted whistling along Cheap Side and up Cornhill to Bishopsgate. He felt a little daunted, however, when he came near to Crosby Hall, the house which had been once a palace, and to which More had recently moved from his much humbler house in Bucklersbury. It reminded him that Master Thomas More, Under-Sheriff for the King and a famous lawyer, was, for all his simple ways, a very great man; and he felt suddenly shy. If this was the sort of company Dick was getting into, surely he, Robin, was a fool to think that his friendship would count much longer. • Afraid to ask admittance he hung about uneasily, wondering if Dick were inside.

A groom was holding a horse by the mounting stone at the gate, and Robin had almost made up his mind to ask if he knew anything of Dick, when the door of the great house opened, and down the steps came More himself, his small son Jack riding on his back and his daughters dancing round him. As he came near the gate he put the boy down and promptly disappeared into a mass of twining arms as all his children tried to kiss him at once.

'Come, come, come!' he said gaily, disentangling himself, 'you all hang round me as if I were going to the wars—whereas I am going, I hope, a-peace-making! Meg, my darling, take your sisters within, and see if you can finish your translation from Livy before I return. Run, now—and see you keep within doors to-day. I will be back to dinner.'

Leaving the children in an anxious little knot, he stepped

briskly through the gates. But Robin was quite shocked to see how worn and worried his face became as soon as he turned his back on the house. But the little family scene had encouraged him, and he ventured to step up to More just as he was about to mount his horse.

‘If you please, sir——’

More turned his head with his quick smile.

‘Why, it’s young chestnut-head! Can I help you, lad? Quick, for my Lord Cardinal is not the man to be kept waiting.’

‘Please, sir, is Dick Parkyn in your house?’ Robin blurted out.

‘No—did you think he was? I haven’t seen him thus many a day— but then I’ve been much occupied.’

‘They said you sent for him, sir.’

‘Not I—though I like well enough to have young folks round me. These are not the times—there’s some mistake, lad. I can’t stay now; but if you can’t find your friend, come to me this evening.’

He rode off, leaving Robin puzzled and beginning to be worried. But, of course, those stupid ‘prentices of Rastell’s must have been mistaken. Dick must have gone to Tom—very likely Tom couldn’t come himself, so had made an acquaintance his messenger. Hurrying his pace, Robin set off for Ironmongers’ Lane.

He found Tom busily at work in the forge behind the shop—but no Dick. Tom was inclined to pooh-pooh Robin’s fears.

‘Why, what could have happened to him? Dick’s not one to venture. Like enough those ‘prentices were lying for amusement, just to fool you, and Dick was within doors all the time.’

‘I suppose that might be,’ agreed Robin.

‘Well, go and make sure. But if he isn’t there—well, we’ll have to hunt for him. Young Dickon certainly isn’t to be trusted, straying in London.’

So back poor Robin raced, getting tired and hungry now. As he ran, he told himself over and over that he was an ass, of course, the 'prentices had thought it good fun to send him on a fool's errand; of course, he would find Dick at the printer's house. But no Dick was there. Master Rastell had gone out, said Mistress Elizabeth. No, Dick was not with him.

'You say you thought my brother More had sent for him? And he hasn't seen him? Well, that's passing strange.' Mistress Rastell's kind, clever face—very like her brother's—grew anxious. 'Where can the boy have gone? I have it, Robin! He'll be among the bookshops in Paternoster Row—or may be at Wynkyn de Worde's bookshop, or in Fleet Street. Or could he be at St. Paul's school, talking with young master Martyn? He's made a great friendship there.'

But at none of these places had anything been seen or heard of Dick. Robin came back sick with anxiety—and with hunger, too, for now it was past midday, and he had eaten nothing but a cake since early morning. Mistress Rastell forced him to eat something, though he wanted to run off to Tom at once.

'Now, now,' she soothed, 'wait until Master Rastell comes, and don't be in a fume. He'll know what's best to be done, and you'll do no good—and only make yourself sick—running about the streets.'

So Robin forced himself to wait through the afternoon, while the city hummed like a hive of bees disturbed. Master Rastell came in looking grave, and reported that the King's Privy Council was met and arguing whether to set an extra watch or to bring in trained bands to keep the peace. Master More, with whom he had spoken, was against this, fearing it would only make the people angrier. He looked still graver when he heard about Dick.

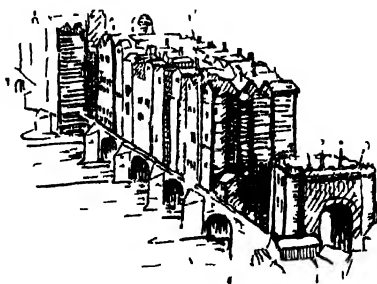
'This is no time for a country lad to be loose in London streets,' he said. 'But where can he have gone? If those

lazy lads of mine spoke true, *someone* called him away—but who should do such a thing? A boy like that can have no enemies.'

Enemies! Like a flash a face came before Robin's mind—a lean, shifty-eyed face topped by tow-coloured hair. *Could* Peter Coo have taken his revenge by luring Dick away?

Robin could not sit any longer.

'I *must* talk to Tom!' he cried, and before Rastell could stop him he was off and away, pelting through the ominously quiet streets as if Peter Coo were round every corner.



PART OF OLD LONDON BRIDGE. FROM THE  
SOUTH BANK, SHOWING THE GATEHOUSE



## CHAPTER XII

### EVIL MAY DAY

TOM was really upset when he heard Robin's story.

'Here 's a pretty coil, indeed !' he exclaimed. 'You 've got yourself into hot water, Robin—your uncle will never forgive you for giving him the slip. But as it turns out, it 's as well you did. Peter Coo ! It 's a chance you 're right. Why didn't you tell me you had seen him?'

'I never thought to,' confessed Robin, 'I only glimpsed him twice, and I didn't see that he could do me any harm if I kept my eyes open. But that he should hurt Dick never came into my mind. Even now I think I 'm wrong, for surely Dick would never trust himself to him.'

'Would Dick remember what he looked like?' suggested Tom. 'He hardly saw him at Guildford—you remember it was you and I that tussled with the lout—and you know what Dick is for not taking notice.'

'We must do *something* !' Robin fumed.

'The best we can do,' said Tom sensibly, 'is to go back to Master Rastell and tell him all we fear. If any one can get speech of Master More, his own brother-in-law should be able ; and Master More is the one man likely to help. He has a kindness for our Dick. But I doubt he 'll be too busy to do much.'

It was after seven now, and the sun was getting low. Shafts of orange light pierced the narrow lanes and flamed back from the small-paned casements. The streets were quiet—much too quiet for a fine May Day Eve.

'There 's no more we can do,' said John Rastell when the boys appeared. 'I have warned the watch to look out for Dick, but they are likely to have their hands full. My brother More is still with the cardinal, and the mayor and aldermen are at the Guildhall—talking and doing naught else. You boys had best bide here.'

But that Tom and Robin could not do. Out they went again, scouring the streets and questioning every one they met if they had seen a slender, fair-headed boy in blue with a tall, ill-looking fellow, narrow-eyed. Of course, dozens had seen such a couple, only it was a dark boy in yellow with a short, bearded man—or something equally unlike what they were looking for.

Darkness fell, and the only lights shone from windows, or from torches stuck in front of the better-class houses. Cheap Side was the best lit up, and looked fairly peaceful. The only liveliness was a pair of 'prentice lads having a fencing match with staves and bucklers, while a crowd of their friends looked on and made bets.

Tom and Robin, pretty hopeless now, but still searching, joined the crowd. They stood watching the mock fight, tired and dispirited, but feeling that they could not bear to go home to bed.

'What 's all this?' an authoritative voice rang out suddenly. 'What are you doing here, fellows? Get to your homes!'

'It 's Alderman Sir John Mundie,' said someone near Robin. 'What does *he* want?'

Apparently the fighters wanted to know too, for one of them asked angrily:

'What 's your meaning, sir? Haven't honest 'prentices a right to their play after working hours?'

For answer Sir John seized him by the scruff of the neck.

'I 'll teach you to answer your betters so, villain!' he stormed. 'It 's the mayor's command that every one be in their houses from seven this night to nine to-morrow morning—and here it 's nearly nine o' the clock and you still about.'

'First we 've heard of it!' 'Let the mayor give his orders, then.' 'Naught 's been said to us.' 'He 's lying. There 's been no order.'

The crowd was swaying and muttering dangerously, and

if the alderman had been wise he would have taken a gentler tone. Instead of which he tightened his grip and shouted :

'I arrest you! To the compter prison, you rascal!'

'That 's done it!' Tom muttered, gripping Robin's arm. 'Let's get out of here.'

It was too late. There was an ugly growl, the crowd flung itself upon Sir John Mundie and snatched his prisoner from him.

'Prentices and clubs! 'Prentices and clubs!'

It was the dreaded danger signal of the city. Out of every door the 'prentices came tumbling to their rallying cry, brandishing sticks and some even daggers. Sir John Mundie, perceiving that the better part of valour was discretion, took to his heels with a mob after him, and what became of him Tom and Robin were not concerned with. They were trying to push their way through to the other side of Cheap Side and the entrance to Friday Street.

But it was no good. The crowd was increasing every minute, swaying, jostling, and shouting. People were pouring out of the side streets, not 'prentices only, but serving-men, small craftsmen and artisans, burly watermen from the riverside, and the usual riff-raff from the dock-side, ready for any mischief.

'Turn out the foreigners! Kick the Dutchmen's backsides! Cut the Italians' throats!' were some of the cries. 'To Newgate! To Newgate! Set free the prisoners!'

The two boys were swept along westward, their only chance of keeping their feet being to go with the crowd. As they surged along past the north gate of St. Paul's, another mob burst out of the churchyard and joined them. It was a wild scene in the starlit darkness, flaming torches casting flickering lights here and there so that a face or an uplifted arm would suddenly flash into sight and then be lost in shadows.

Robin was wrenched away from Tom, and though for a

while they struggled to get back to each other it was no good. They drifted farther and farther apart. Robin fought and wriggled his way to a doorway, where, clinging to an iron hitching-post, he managed to hold fast for a little and get his breath. Tom had disappeared. The crowd flowed by like an endless river, and presently cries and curses, and an occasional yell of pain, told that they had attacked the prison guards of Newgate jail.

Now the press was thinner. Robin, crouching on the doorstep, tried to collect his scattered wits and think what he ought to do. Common sense said, cross Cheap Side and make for Friday Street and Master Rastell's house. But it was dark, there were still ugly knots of the worst type of slum-dweller, taking their chance in the excitement of breaking into the shops and carrying off loot. Robin was scared of falling in with any of these gangs – and besides, where was Tom?

How long he crouched there Robin did not know, but at last came the sound of steadily marching feet. Presently he could make out a group of men armed with pikes, helmets on their heads, and some in half armour. At their head rode Thomas More himself! Robin sprang up with a new hope. The torchlight shining on that keen, calm face was somehow reassuring. Here was someone steady and strong. Hardly knowing why, he trotted along by the side of the men-at-arms.

Tom, meanwhile, though carried further along Newgate Street, kept a cool head and an open eye for the best chance that should turn up.

'All the thieves in London are out to-night,' he reflected, 'and the chances are that a rogue like Peter Coo will be out too. Now, it's not very likely that I shall meet him in this confounded dark and confusion, but it might happen.'

And luck was with him, for presently, as he drew himself little by little out of the crowd, he washed up, as it were, by

a small goldsmith's shop. It was not one of the best and finest, being only a one-man affair owned by some craftsman trying to get a business going; but a couple of rascals had burst open the door and were ransacking the place, while the goodwife—she was but young—screamed in vain for help and the goodman lay on the floor with a bleeding head. And Tom recognized one of the thieves!

'Here,' he said to himself, 'is where I take a chance.' And a thwack of his cudgel from behind laid one of the looters flat beside the master of the place.

The other, who was Peter Coo, turned, stared with open eyes, and then dodged for the broken door; but Tom was between him and it, and brought him neatly down with his cudgel between his legs. He did not want to knock the wits out of him until he had got what he wanted. Sitting astride Peter's body, his hands feeling caressingly round his throat, Tom demanded:

'What have you done with Dick Parkyn?'

'What should I know of Dick Parkyn?' Peter whined. 'Dunno who he is.'

'You 're lying,' Tom said joyfully, 'you do know who he is, and if ye didn't know something of him, ye 'd not deny him. Out with it afore I choke you.'

'You can choke the life out o' me,' snarled Peter, 'but I don't know nothing.'

Tom's hands tightened. 'You got him away with a lying message,' he said. 'Where did you take him to? Answer me, you crop-eared sneak-thief!'

Apparently the feel of Tom's hands—the strong hands of one used to the hammer—convinced Peter that he meant business, for he muttered:

'Meant no more than to give the little fool a fright.'

'Where is he?' Tom's tone was menacing.

'Tell ye I don't *know*!' Coo almost screamed. 'He gave me the slip in Pudding Lane this evening—I swear I was

a-fetching of him home! Do let me go, master—I'm but a poor lad and every man's hand's been against me since you treated me so ill down Guildford way.'

Tom was at a loss to know what to do next, not knowing whether Coo were lying or how to get anything reliable out of him. But the matter was taken out of his hands. The crowd, having broken open Newgate prison and set free those who lay in jail for assaulting foreigners, was storming back through the Shambles to St. Martin's. Tom's attention was distracted for a moment by the noise. Coo seized his chance, gave a quick wriggle which upset his captor, and before Tom could grab him again had scrambled to his feet and disappeared in the dark. Tom stamped with rage—but it was too black to give chase.

He discovered now that the goldsmith's wife was bathing her husband's head and trying to thank him at the same time.

'Better get him up to your bedchamber, mistress, and lock the door. This night is not over yet,' Tom advised. 'Wait, and I'll give you a hand.'

He helped her to carry the groaning man up the narrow stairs, and then, feeling that there was no more he could do for them, and anyway other matters needed his attention, he went and peered out from the window, which overlooked St. Martin's Street. He was wild with himself for letting Coo escape, though as he became cooler he reflected that it was not much use to keep him, supposing he spoke the truth. What next?

Something was happening at St. Martin's Gate—the crowd was halted there, and a parley of some sort seemed to be going on.

Below him he could see the heads of the crowd, those in front well lit up by the flare of torches. To one side was the church of St. Martin's, and it seemed, from the sounds, that a fair number of rioters had got inside, perhaps with the idea of using it as a fortress. Beyond on his horse sat

Thomas More, with a goodly array of servants and armed men behind him. He seemed to be arguing—with good effect too—with the crowd. Tom could not hear what he said.

But Robin could hear. He was pressed as close as possible to the men-at-arms, and naturally enough, in the uncertain torchlight, Tom did not see him. Neither had Robin any idea that his friend was looking down on the scene from an upper window.

Thomas More spoke with a quiet, clear voice, and just at first the crowd behind, who did not know what was happening, nearly drowned his words with their yells and clatter. But those in front wanted to hear.

'Master More! It's Master More! Hold your gab, you, and listen to Master More!'

It was clear that More was loved and trusted. The sound of his voice worked like magic, and for a little while the angry, excited mass of men and boys quieted down and all their faces were turned, straining to catch what he said. Tom thought how queer they all looked, picked out by the ruddy light, staring eyes and open mouths and hands clutching at their clubs and staves as if they had been turned into dummies by some magic.

'My good friends—citizens of fair London'—More must have repeated this several times—'what are you about? Have you all gone mad? Surely nothing but madness could make you—honest folk as I know well—break the peace of the King's Majesty and bring a kind of war to the streets of your own city! Have you grievances? Have you injustice? Then you have your remedy. Bring your complaints to me and to my fellows, but quietly, quietly, or how can we hear if you deafen us?'

He smiled as he spoke, that quick, humorous twist of the lips that made a friendly feeling all about him. Someone out of the crowd answered him.

'Aye, Master More, that's all very well. But can you

dc away with the foreigners that take the bread out of our mouths?’

‘Can you get your bread by burning, robbery, and murder?’ More’s voice grew deeper. ‘Nay, but you know very well what will come of this if you persist—already my Lord Mayor has sent for soldiers, and by daylight many of you will be in prison, awaiting the gallows! It will be a sad May Day for you unless you leave this madness and go to your homes as peaceful citizens should.

‘And do but think, my good friends!’ Now his voice shook with the depth of his feeling. ‘What you are doing is rebellion against the king’s peace—it is a sort of civil war. What is more terrible than civil war—war between Englishmen, between brothers? For the soldiers that will be sent against you are your fellow countrymen and no foreigners. War is a dreadful thing at all times, and not to be undertaken except for some great issue. But civil war is the most awful thing than can befall a nation, as our fathers very well knew. Therefore I say to you, Thank God for our good king and his peaceful times, and do not break this peace! But go to your homes like good men and true, and I will pledge myself that no action shall be taken against those of you who have been led astray by wild and foolish words. Go home, good citizens, go home!’

Robin drew a deep breath. How quiet they all were! One or two even began to slink away, shamefaced, into the shadows. Master More had won!

Then suddenly from the tower of St. Martin’s church, that overlooked the street, came a rattle of stones and the hissing sound of water dashed from boiling cauldrons. Some stinging drops fell on Robin, and he yelped like a startled puppy; but the man nearest him, a sergeant-at-arms, got a scalding stream over one side of his face and neck, and others of More’s party staggered and cried out in pain. The ringleaders of the mob had seized the tower



as a sort of fort, and had no mind (being marked men, and not likely to be let escape) to have their followers desert them.

'Steady, friends, steady!' More cried—but it was too late.

'Down with them! Cut them down, the villains!' shouted the officer, stamping with agony.

And then pandemonium broke loose, and the crowd burst into the houses right and left, looting and destroying, surged into Cheap Side and ran madly across the Poultry in the direction of Lombard Street, where they knew that the wealthy Italians lived. Some of More's men-at-arms charged for the door of St. Martin's, to be met by fresh showers of stones and boiling water. But now they were as angry as the rioters, and back they came to the attack.

Robin pressed against a wall and, forgetting all danger in his interest in what was happening, saw some of them burst into the church. Perhaps the defenders were running short of hot water! Tom, hanging out of the window and craning his neck, could not make out so well what was happening. He had half a mind to come down; but his cool common sense reminded him that he did not mean to get mixed up in this if he could keep out of it, and he stayed where he was.

A fearful racket was going on inside the church. More and some of his companions, seeing they could do no more good, had ridden away by the side streets to take further counsel—not that any thing could be done, for the rioters were completely out of hand. Robin could hear screams of terror, yells of frenzy, the crash of breaking doors and shop fronts, howls, threats—and suddenly into the midst of it all a fearful thunder—the crash of exploding cannon fire.

'The Tower guns!' the cry went up. 'They are firing on the city!'

'It's that Sir Roger Cholmely,' someone muttered. 'No

friend of common folk, he isn't. Glad o' the chance to murder us all !'

Perhaps it was the shock of the firing, but within St. Martin's the rioters all at once gave in. Men-at-arms began to stagger into the street, hauling prisoners out by neck and arm, some of them struggling, some limp, scared, and submissive. Robin recognized John Lincoln, staggering past him with blood running down his face. Some were quite young boys, no older than Robin himself. One was——

'Dick! Dick!' Robin shrieked, so loud that his voice reached Tom in the window above; and he hurled himself, quite past thinking of consequences on to the man-at-arms who had Dick tucked under one arm like a chicken while with the other hand he grasped a long, lanky fellow by his tow-coloured hair. The man was so surprised by the boy's furious attack that he dropped Dick—who seemed to be in a faint—and the tow-haired fellow at the same time took his chance, twisted himself free and made off.

When Tom heard the voice of one friend crying the name of the other, all his caution left him. He swung himself over the sill, hung by his long arms for a moment, then dropped springily on the cobbles. Dick lay in a heap, in danger of being trodden under foot. Tom caught him up, hoisted him over his shoulder, dodged back into the house and dropped him in a dark corner while he leaped back to help Robin.

But Robin was past helping—the soldier had him fast and was dragging him off with the other prisoners. Tom, grinding his teeth with fury, knew that he could do nothing. He would only get arrested too—and what about Dick then?

## CHAPTER XIII

### ROBIN PAYS

TOM wasted no time, but stepped back into the goldsmith's house. The mayor's men-at-arms were hunting through the streets, not daring to face the main mass of the crowd until their forces should be strengthened, but sweeping up any stragglers they could lay hands on. Innocent or guilty, it did not much matter; it was better not to be found by them. So Tom pulled to the broken shop door after him before he looked to see how Dick was getting on.

He was sitting up, with his hand to his head and a dazed look in his eyes. Tom could see him by the light of a candle which the goldsmith's wife was carrying slowly down the narrow steep stairway. When she reached the last step she stood still and looked nervously round the wrecked shop.

'What is it?' she said in a frightened whisper.

'They've gone,' Tom told her from where he knelt by Dick. 'My frierd here is hurt——'

'Ah, the poor lamb!' She came across quickly and stood over them. 'What have they done to him?'

'I don't know,' Tom was beginning when Dick, indignant at being called a lamb, lifted up his head and tried to get up.

'I took a crack on my head from the church door when that sergeant hauled me out,' he said, 'and it knocked me silly for a little. But it's nothing. May I have some water?'

'Indeed you shall have better than water,' cried the young woman warmly and went away into the back room. She came back with two cups of wine, and when both boys had draty they felt distinctly better.

'An f'low what?' said Dick standing up, still a little

unsteadily. 'Can we go home? Faith, I am hungry—I've had naught to eat all day.'

'You bide here,' said the woman, 'till I get you something—nay, the master owes his life, very likely, to that tall friend of yours, so it's the least I can do.'

'Thank ye very kindly, mistress,' said Tom—he was beginning to feel pretty empty himself, and hunting up a couple of stools he shoved one towards Dick and sat on the other, as the woman disappeared again. They heard her calling to a serving wench who must have hidden herself in the attics.

'And now,' said Tom, 'where have you been all this day, Dick? Robin and I have been nearly crazed seeking you.'

'It wasn't my fault!' Dick grinned faintly. 'I'd scarce said good-bye to Robin when a tall fellow that I didn't know came to Master Rastell's with word that Master More wanted to speak with me. But as we went through the Lanes he suddenly clapped a hand over my mouth and dragged me into a foul-smelling cottage, and there he tied me up and mocked me. He said I was the first, and soon he'd get you two. I couldn't make head nor tail of it, till suddenly it came to me that it was Peter Coo. So I asked him what he wanted with me.'

'What did he say to that?' Tom's brows were knit as he tried to put two and two together.

'Said that we three had spoiled his luck at Guildford, and he'd spoil ours in London town. Then he said that it was you he wanted most, and he'd let me go free if I'd write a letter to you saying I was there, and hurt, and wanted you to come. So, of course, I laughed at him. I said if he had such a need of you he could bring you himself, which I didn't think would be so easy. Whereupon he kicked me.'

'Did he, by St. Denys!' cried Tom. 'And then?'

'Then he went away and left me. The time was very

long, and I felt sick because of the kick he gave me. It's still sore. Also I was mightily afraid. Well, I suppose it must have been towards evening, he came back, and again bade me write to you, or it would be the worse for me.'

'And then?' asked Tom, as Dick stopped.

'I told him not to be a fool. I said you'd have more sense than to come, anyway. But then, Tom—I'm afraid I did wrong?'

'Why, Dickon—what happened?' Tom's usually abrupt voice was oddly gentle.

'Why—you see I was very tired, and my side hurt, and the place smelt vile. So I said if he'd let me go I'd give him money. Luckily I had only a tester on me, but father had left me three gold angels—and I swore I'd give him a gold piece, and say naught of what he'd done, if he'd but let me go. I'm sorry I was such a coward.'

'I don't see what else you could ha' done,' Tom confessed. 'Anyway, I think it was brave of you, Dickon, not to write that letter. I might well ha' come, and no doubt he had some villainous friends all ready to catch me. But what did he do then?'

'I could see he was sorely tempted, but he was feared to trust me. He stood scratching his head, and then on a sudden he grinned evilly, and said he'd thought of a way. It was getting dark now, and he untied my feet, but kept a rope round my wrist and so tethered me to him. With that he led me in and out the Lanes till my head was in a maze, and I'd no notion where we could be. But all London seemed awake and stirring, and suddenly we were in the midst of a great crowd all shouting, "Down with the foreigners!" So then I saw my chance, and getting my knife in my hand I cut the cord and slipped into the mob before he could follow me. Then I saw where we had got to—we were just south of St. Paul's churchyard, and I thought I could easily get back to Master Rastell's. But that I couldn't do, for the crowd was so thick I had no

choice but to go where they went, and so was carried through the churchyard and into Cheap Side. But there I had better luck, or so I thought, for I found myself pushed into St. Martin's Lane, and there I bethought me of the church, and in I ran.'

'But others had the same thought,' interrupted Tom.

'Yes, though at first it was quiet and empty, I sat down by a pillar to get my breath, and thought I'd better stay there till the streets cleared—I'd no notion how bad it was! But as I lay there I remembered Dr. Bell's sermon, and all that my father feared, and I can tell you I wished me safe in Guildford town! I heard shrieks and curses, and crashing of woodwork, and the red light of fires shone in at the tall windows—and oh, Tom, if I were scared before, I was near crazy then! At last I thought it was quieter, and I stepped to the door to see if I couldn't get across Cheap Side and go home. And just then—who should rush into St. Martin's but Peter Coo himself, with his face all bloody! He saw me and laughed, and I dodged from him and ran among the choir stalls. And then there burst into the church all manner of grim-looking men, armed with stones and some carrying cauldrons—but it was too dark to see clearly. I don't well know what happened after that, for I was crouched under a choir stall like a mouse in a hole——'

'Never mind,' put in Tom, 'I know, for I saw it all, and I'll tell you by and by. But how did you get caught?'

'Why'—Dick laughed a little in spite of everything—'in the midst of all the noise of crashing stones and hissing water, and oaths and screams, there came a cry of "The mayor's men! The mayor's men!" and those that were in the tower came clattering down, and there was hoodman blind in the dark all over the church. And if Peter Coo, who I suppose had given me up, didn't come scrambling and skulking in among the choir stalls to hide! And so as luck would have it the sergeant who was chasing

him found me too, and hauled us both forth. And, as I said, I hit my head a crack against the door and all went black. But I supposed you saved me, Tom.'

'No,' said Tom slowly, 'twasn't I that saved you. 'Twas Robin.'

There was a dead silence while Dick's eyes grew round and big and he tried to take it in. Then he exclaimed:

'But—Robin? How could it be Robin? He was away this morning with my father.'

At that moment the goodwife came bustling back with a platter of broken meats which she had been heating up to make more tasty, and a manchet of white bread.

'There!' she cried. 'Fall to, you poor lads, and break your fast. You must stay here till the streets are quiet—swear to me that you will! I must away to my poor man—I hear him groaning cruel!'

'How is he, dame?' asked Tom, cutting a slice of bread with his knife.

'I think he's more hurt by the wrecking of his shop than the blow on the head,' she answered shrewdly. 'But la! What's a few trinkets stolen compared with life? And we'd ha' lost more, and maybe our lives too, but for you!'

She bustled up the stair, calling as she went, 'Anon, anon, goodman; I'm coming.'

'Eat,' Tom bade Dick, thrusting into his friend's hand one of the horn spoons their hostess had set on the bench, and setting an example himself. But Dick was not satisfied.

'Tom—what is this about Robin? How did he come to be here? Now I remember—you said you and he had been crazed about me, but I didn't heed. Do tell me!'

'Eat then while I tell,' commanded Tom, and while Dick ate hungrily he made as long a tale of their adventures as he could, putting off the evil time when he must admit that Robin was a prisoner. He came to it at last, however. Dick's spoon fell with a splash into the platter and he started up.

'But Tom—Tom—we can't leave him—we must go—we must—Tom, what can we *do*?'

'Finish our suppers,' said Tom, a good deal more calmly than he felt. 'Robin's all right for now. They'll ha' put him in the compter for the night, and though he'll be mighty discomforted, he'll be safe enough. Come morning we'll go to Master More.'

'Of course, Master More! He'll see all's right.' Dick sat down again. 'But, oh, Tom, poor Robin! And to think he came back for my sake—and I might be where he is, but for him! I do think a man never had so good a friend!'

'Aye,' Tom grunted. 'One in a million, our Robin. If there was anything we could do for him at this moment, Dickon, be sure I wouldn't rest here. But we'd never get hold of Master More to-night, and so I say no harm'll come to Robin in the meanwhile.'

'I suppose you're right,' agreed Dick reluctantly. 'Ha! What was that?'

All the while they had been talking they could hear, some way off, the roar of the rioting mob, and occasionally the guns of the Tower barking. But now there came a new sound—the steady, disciplined trot of a large body of men, and the clatter of horse hoofs on the cobbled streets. Tom went to a window and peered through the chink of a shutter. Grey morning was stealing through London streets.

'As I thought it would be,' he reported. 'Some of the great lords have arrived with their men. That was the Earl of Surrey! Now Master John Lincoln will be sorry that ever he started up this coil. Heigh-ho! Dickon, I'm tired to death.'

'And no wonder!' The good wife had come down again. 'All will be well now that the earl's men are come. Look, here's the pallet where our 'prentices—beshrew them! They've both run off with the rest—lie o' nights,



and here 's a blanket. Roll you up in it and sleep—it 's nigh morning.'

So the exhausted boys lay down under the goldsmith's broken counter—and knew nothing more until the sun was streaming through the opened shutters, and the goodwife stood over them calling them to a breakfast of pickled herring and small beer.

'All 's quiet now,' she said. 'The Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury, and Lord of St. John and others are come to London, and the Duke of Norfolk with thirteen hundred men, 'tis said. And they 've taken above three hundred prisoners, among them that wicked priest Dr. Bell that started all the trouble, and John Lincoln who they say egged him on. And they 'll be hanged as sure as my name 's Susan Marrick!'

Tom and Dick had not much appetite for breakfast at this news. More than anything else they wanted to get in touch with their friends. But Mistress Marrick told them that the streets were full of the lords' retainers, who were closely questioning every one. The boys realized that they might have some difficulty in accounting for themselves. They could not deny that they had been with the rioters last night!

Their hostess, however, solved that difficulty.

'Where is 't ye dwell?' she asked. 'Bread Street? What, at Master Rastell's? Sure, every one knows him. Look now, it 's but a step, and I 'll go along with you and testify to what you did for me if they should stop you.'

Which she did, and a good thing it was, for the torn and battered appearance of the two boys made them objects of suspicion. But their neat and comely escort saw them safely along Cheap Side and to the door of Master Rastell's house, where with a smile and a curtsy she left them.

Tom breathed a great sigh. 'I felt as if I were in the nursery again,' he confessed when she had gone. 'That

ever I should be led through the streets at my age by a woman!’

‘If you hadn’t been by, I lay she ’d ha’ kissed me,’ said Dick. ‘I saw it in her eye! And me fourteen years old last Candlemas!’

Fourteen or not, Dick found himself soundly kissed by Mistress Rastell, who fell upon him the moment he entered the house, hugged him, and wept over him in her relief. John Rastell stood by, trying to force his kindly face into a ferocious frown, as he demanded what a plague they had been up to, to give them all a fright like that. A good whipping was what they deserved, and by Saint George, Saint Michael, Saint Denys, and a host of others, a whipping Dick should have, and Tom’s master would see that he got one too.

But his face changed when he heard the story, excellently told by Dick, of how it all had come about. And when it came to Robin’s rescue and the danger he was in, Mistress Rastell very nearly burst out crying again.

‘Oh, John!’ she cried, ‘we must get word to my brother More at once! To think of that pretty lad in a stinking prison among felons, in danger of his life.’

‘Yes, wife, we must act at once,’ said Rastell decidedly. ‘I’ll send to Thomas this instant. Don’t you fret, Dickon boy, we’ll soon have brave master Robin out of prison.’

But Master More, it appeared, was not to be easily got at that day. Rastell’s messenger chased him from his house to the Guildhall, from the Guildhall to my Lord Cardinal’s house at Bridewell, from Bridewell to the Inns of Court, found him at last with the Lord Chief Justice, and was told that the council could not be interrupted. He gave up and came home in despair. Thereupon Rastell sent him off again with orders not to leave More’s house until he came home, and to deliver the letter into his own hands. But More did not come home that night.

It was a miserable May Day for all the citizens of

London. The great Maypole by St. Andrew's was not set up—in fact, it was never used again. The streets were patrolled by bands of armed men, who mocked and jeered at those citizens who had to go abroad on business. Various scraps of news kept coming in, and they were not of a cheerful character.

Tom had gone to give an account of himself to Master Bolton, and got permission from that kindly smith to go back and be with his friend.

'Dr. Bell and John Lincoln, and several others, have been sent to the Tower,' he reported. 'To-morrow it's said that all the prisoners will be hauled to the Guildhall to be examined. The Duke of Norfolk is in high glee, for that at last he can revenge himself on the citizens of London.'

'What for?' asked Dick listlessly.

'Why, I don't know if it's true, but the story is that a servant of his, a great villain, got into a brawl in Cheap Side a year ago and was slain. They do say that the duke said then, grinding his teeth, "I pray God I may once have the citizens in my power!" And now he has them.'

'And so many innocent will suffer with the guilty!' exclaimed Mistress Rastell. 'What a crying shame it is that these great lords should have power over poor men!'

'I doubt if he has the power he thinks he has,' said Rastell. 'My Lord Cardinal, if he chooses, can put him down, or any other lord. And the cardinal is one of the commoners himself, and the goodwill of the people is useful to him. So let the Duke of Norfolk brag, Cardinal Wolsey has him on a leash.'

This talk meant nothing much to the boys, who naturally did not understand politics. But they realized that the cardinal was not likely to let things go too hardly with the Londoners, and had to be content with that hope for the present.

Next day a note came from More. Tom had come over

again, and he and Dick held their breath as Rastell broke the seal. Their hearts went down in their shoes as his face lengthened over it.

'Master More says there's little he can do yet,' said Rastell. 'If Robin had merely been gathered in with the crowd, my brother could have got him released on his surety. But it seems there's a special count against him for assaulting a sergeant, and he'll have to stand his trial.'

'He did that for me!' Dick almost sobbed.

'All the prisoners are being brought to the Guildhall to-day,' Rastell went on. 'Master More says he will do his best, not only for Robin, but for all the poor youngsters who, from sheer silly mischief or bad luck, have got caught in this miserable mischance.'

'But where is Robin?' asked Tom. 'They haven't put him in the Tower, surely?'

'No, no, all the common prisoners are in Newgate.'

'Look,' said Dick, 'when they bring them through the street, can't we stand by and watch for them? It would cheer poor Robin to get a sight of us.'

'Surely!' Rastell agreed heartily. 'That's very well thought of. There'll be a great crush, be sure, but if we stand close together, we shall do well enough. It'll be a sad enough sight, though.'

A sad sight it was. Roped together, bloodstained, dusty, and torn, the prisoners limped along. They were pale with fear and with the stifling prison air. Most of them were 'prentice lads between eighteen and twenty-three or four, but there were also craftsmen, of all ages, a good number of masterless men from the slums of London who had joined the rioting for the sake of loot. There was even a priest or two. A few marched defiantly with heads up and burning eyes, but most shuffled along wretchedly. Two or three young boys were openly snivelling, the tears, which they could not wipe away because of their bound hands, making cleaner streaks on their dirty faces.

And there was Robin! His usually ruddy face was white, but he carried his chestnut head well up and his lips pressed tightly together.

'Robin! Robin!' yelled Dick above the moans and mutterings of the onlookers. Robin turned his head in the direction of the sound, and saw the group of his friends.

He could not wave, but he jerked his head and grinned courageously. As he passed by they could see that he trod with more spring in his step, and were glad that they had come.

But as they turned to go home a dull knocking began away westward in the direction of Newgate; more hammering answered it from St. Martin's, and further east the ugly sound came again. Thud, thud, thud!

'What is it?' Dick asked the question through stiff lips, and guessed the answer before it came.

'They are building the gallows!'

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE KING'S MERCY

LONDON was a city of gloom and mourning. Eleven gallows were set up throughout the city.

'You can scarce go anywhere without the sight of bodies dangling,' said Rastell with sick disgust. 'Merc boys, some of them. No, Dick, you needn't look so pale—our Robin is still safe. But how many more they mean to hang I can't tell. That Lord Edward Howard, son to the Duke of Norfolk, is as savage as his father and showed no mercy, but extreme cruelty to the poor younglings in their execution.'

'They say John Lincoln is to die to-morrow,' Tom said, 'with Sherwin, and the brothers Betts and others.'

'Have they caught Peter Coe?' inquired Dick.

'That I can't say. But Lincoln is to be drawn to Cheap Side on a hurdle, and there hanged on the gallows by the Standard. Shall we go to see it?'

'Not I!' said Dick, shrinking. 'A hanging is not my notion of sport, Tom—laugh at me for a milksop if you like.'

'There I'm with you, lad,' agreed Master Rastell warmly. 'I think it is a barbarous thing that men—and women too—should make hol'day and crowd to see a fellow creature die!'

'I dare say you're right,' Tom said coolly, 'though there aren't many who'd thank you for taking away the sight of a hanging. But it's not for sport I mean to be there, but just to make sure.'

Tom was indeed looking sick and weary. During the past week he had haunted every place where news could be got, and seen so many horrible sights that his stomach was fairly turned. It was now a week since that fatal day,

which came to be known later as the Evil May Day; and still the prisoners were left in the hands of the savage duke and his equally savage son. The king was at Richmond and had made no sign of mercy, though it was whispered that the cardinal himself had advised it. Thomas More was known to be doing all he could, but so far he had not been able to give his friends any hope.

<sup>4</sup> At first, thinking that they would soon be able to win Robin's release, Rastell had sent no word of his son's plight to Squire Polstead. But now he sat down and sadly wrote his difficult letter, sending it by a trusted servant. He offered to forward a letter to Ned Elrington, though it would mean adding several miles to his man's journey; and Tom gratefully accepted.

Dick scarcely left the house all that week, except to slip into All Hallows' church near-by and pray for Robin's safety. He grew so thin and white that Tom was afraid that he would fall ill with fretting.

But on the afternoon of 7th May, Tom came into Master Rastell's house with brighter eyes. Dick, springing up to greet him, saw it at once.

'What news?' he cried. 'There is something—I know there is!'

Tom shook his head. 'It's only a gleam,' he answered. 'But it's something. The king has taken a hand at last.'

'I heard a great noise of cheering,' said Dick. 'What was it?'

'Call Master Rastell,' suggested Tom. 'He'll want to hear.'

Rastell came from his workshop, his fingers still stained with printers' ink, for in those days the master worked with his hands among his men. Mistress Rastell left her maids in the kitchen, and young Will crept up to hear what he could.

'They hanged John Lincoln,' Tom began, 'and, faith, the man made a good end! As near as I can remember,

this is what he said: "My Lords, I meant well, for if you knew the mischief that is made in this realm by strangers, you would remedy it. And many times I have complained, and then I was called a busy fellow. Now, our Lord have mercy upon me!" So he died, and kept a steadfast face to the end. But—when his fellows already had the ropes about their necks, suddenly there came a messenger spurring from the king himself; and he cried that the execution of the next should be stayed. And at that all the people cried "God save the King!"

'Good! Good! I was sure His Gracious Majesty would have mercy in the end!' cried Mistress Rastell.

'And there is further good news,' Tom went on. 'The armed men are to be withdrawn from the city, and we shall have no more of their gibes and bullying.'

But after this, for a whole fortnight the days dragged by without any more certain news. Master Rastell's servant returned with a letter from Robin's elder brother Richard. It told of further trouble—Squire Polstead, on hearing the bad news, had been seized with so severe an attack of his old enemy, the gout, that he was unable to leave his bed, or he would have hurried at once to London. Richard could not leave the farm. He thanked Robin's good friends for all they were doing and would pray daily for his brother's safety. Master Rastell was inclined to be indignant over this seeming indifference, but Dick, with a faint smile, explained that Richard was no hand with a pen, anyhow; and if he as well as Robin were to be away their father would certainly kill himself with anxiety.

Tom got no answer to his letter, as his father was away at Shere Vachery, bargaining for iron ore.

At last they heard through Thomas More that a party of aldermen who visited the king at Greenwich to ask pardon and mercy for the prisoners had been very severely lectured for not having done more to put down the riot.

'But methought,' remarked More, 'that His Majesty was



not quite so stern as he thought it best to feign himself. He talks of coming himself to Westminster to give judgment in person.'

'Can we see him?' Dick asked eagerly. 'Is he as tall and handsome as they say?'

'Surely you shall see him,' smiled More. 'He will come by river, and I had already thought to take my wife and children by boat. How say you, John? Will you and Elizabeth join us, with Will and Dick, and Tom too if he can get leave?'

'Well, that is just like you, Thomas!' cried Dame Elizabeth warmly. 'It will do us all good, after being so moping mum. And I can't believe but that our young king will have mercy when he sees all those poor younglings face to face.'

'Truly, I hope so,' said More. 'The king is not, I think, cruel by nature.'

'Why, surely not! How could one ever think so?' said Mistress Rastell in surprise. More shook his head slightly and was silent. Already he guessed at some of the ugly possibilities that lay behind Henry's handsome face and hearty ways. But he was too wise to hint at any such thing.

The river Thames—a wider river than it is now, and running, above the Fleet brook, not between embankments, but gardens on the north and the green Surrey fields on the south—was thick with small craft on the day that the king came to Westminster Hall for judgment. More's party embarked early, from the Vintry wharf, for the undersheriff had to join the other magistrates of London to receive the king, but early as they were the boatmen had some trouble in making their way down stream because of small boats, not always too skilfully rowed, continually cutting across their path and nearly fouling their oars. The little girls were merry and excited, for they had no friends in danger and to them it was nothing but a jolly

show. Only Meg noticed Dick's strained face and slipped her hand into his with a friendly little squeeze.

At Whitehall stairs More left them, to take his place with the mayor and aldermen. Presently a stir among the crowd announced the arrival of the great Cardinal Wolsey, and the young folks nearly upset the boat as they all stood up and craned their necks. Really, he made nearly as good a show as the king himself!

'Room for my Lord Cardinal! On, masters, make room for my Lord Cardinal!' shouted the gentlemen ushers. Then appeared the cross bearers and pillow bearers, on horses trapped in scarlet; the cardinal's great scarlet hat resting on one pillow, the broad seal of England on the other. Then came Wolsey himself, a great red-faced, heavy-jowled, scarlet-robed figure overflowing the mule he rode with his own draperies and the crimson velvet trappings. On either side of him marched men-at-arms, the sun glinting from their pole-axes.

'He looks like a butcher's son, doesn't he?' Meg More whispered to Dick with a wicked little giggle. 'Can't you see him standing by a stall and crying "What 'll ye buy? What 'll ye buy? Prime beef and mutton!"'

Dick, for all his worry, could not help laughing.

Then a great shout rang across the water as the king's barge came in sight, gilded and canopied, the water sliding in flashing gleams as the oars dipped and rose regularly. On through the water lane it came, while the people cheered themselves hoarse, and boats rocked dangerously. At first it was difficult to pick out the king, for the barge seemed to be loaded with a confusion of silks and velvets, gold and gems. But at Whitehall stairs a huge figure in violet disentangled itself, leaping actively from the barge with hardly a touch of the hand held out respectfully to assist. His Majesty was only twenty-seven, and still so vain of his agility that he liked to show off on every occasion.

There he stood, a truly magnificent figure, broad-shouldered and looking broader still in the great-sleeved, full-coated fashion of the day. Under his flat feathered cap his hair gleamed like new gold and his face was as fresh and ruddy as a boy's. He stood still for a moment, waving his hand to his people, and the rings that loaded his fingers flashed sparks of many-coloured fire. Then, his gentlemen disembarking behind him, he strode up the steps. The magistrates received him bowing; he joined the cardinal, and the two big figures, purple and scarlet, were swallowed up in the gorgeous crowd of nobles as they moved away. The spectacle was over for the present.

'They'll be bringing the prisoners now,' Tom said. 'Can I go ashore, sir?' 'I might get a sight of our Robin.'

'I'll come too,' Dick cried, and, as Rastell nodded consent, they sprang out of the boat and hurried up the steps.

But this time they were unlucky. The crowd was so thick that they could not come within many yards of the prisoners, who were limping their footsore way down Whitehall from the village of Charing. In those days there were no convenient lamp posts for boys to climb! They saw nothing but the tail of the procession as it disappeared. But they did notice a very odd thing, which was, that here and there a man or boy in the crowd would strip off his holiday attire, throw his coat to friends to take care of, and mingle with the prisoners in his shirt sleeves. And each of these had provided himself with a halter round his neck!

After the prisoners had been taken into Westminster Hall, the crowd still hung about, for many of them had sons, husbands, sweethearts, or friends among the unlucky. Some of them sat down and ate provisions which they had been thoughtful enough to bring with them, and Tom and Dick, remembering a certain hamper carefully guarded by Mistress More, went hopefully back to the boat. They were rewarded by a cold leg of chicken each and a manchet

of bread, and with these in their hands went back to stroll restlessly in and out of the crowd before the great door of the hall. Dick could not even work up an interest in the beautiful abbey, where the new stones of Henry VII's chapel showed white against the grey of the ancient work.

'If only,' he sighed, 'we could know what's going on! Tom—what did you really think of the king?'

'He looked mighty fine,' said Tom, 'but his eyes are too small for so large a face. Also his mouth is little and tight. Now I've noticed that men of truly great hearts have generally wide mouths.'

'But every one says the king is generous,' urged Dick.

Tom shrugged his shoulders. 'Well, I may be wrong. But my guess is that King Harry is only generous because he wants to be thought so, and not because he truly cares. If he had had a heart for his people, wouldn't he have come to London himself when the trouble was on, instead of sulking in his palace at Richmond?'

'Tom, you shouldn't say such things!' protested Dick, rather horrified. 'All the same,' he added in a whisper. 'I didn't think him as handsome as he's said to be.'

Just then, within Westminster Hall, a terrific yell rang out, voices young and old, deep and shrill, mingling together.

'God save the king! God bless the King's Majesty! Thanks, humble thanks to the King's Grace! A pardon! A pardon!'

The crowd round the doors took up the cry, it echoed back from the abbey walls and was taken up along Whitehall and from the clustered boats upon the Thames. 'A pardon! A pardon! God save the king!'

In a few minutes out they came streaming, still in their shirts and marked with the grime and pallor of their imprisonment, but with their hands unbound and the halters gone from their necks. Some leaped and pranced in the joy of their deliverance, others walked in a sort of

daze, and a few scuttled out with stealthy sideways glances and mingled as quickly as possible with the crowd, as though they were afraid they might be taken up again.

'Look, Dick, there goes Peter Coo—the rascal!' Tom exclaimed. 'So he was taken after all.'

But Peter, slinking up to a ruffianly group of young men, grabbed from one of them the coat he was holding and hastily slipped it on. Tom had no time just then to work out the meaning of this, for Dick gave a great cry and rushing forward flung his arms about Robin—a pale, bewildered Robin who looked about him as though he scarcely knew what had happened. But the colour came into his face when he saw his friends.

'Robin! Robin!' blubbered Dick, 'Oh, Robin! you might have been hanged for me!'

Tom thumped him heartily on the back.

'Brave Robin! Ah, it's good to have you back! Come away, to the boat, and so home. Here's Master and Mistress Rastell, and Mistress More and all awaiting you!'

Robin hung back a little.

'Truly I'm not fit,' he protested. 'The inside of Newgate's a lousy place, and I fear I carry on me a few nasty guests——'

'Don't be so dainty, man! Aren't they all longing to see you and hear your story? As for vermin, a good bath and clean clothes will put all that to rights.'

So Robin allowed himself to be led to the boat, but he insisted on sitting forward well away from the other passengers. Mistress More at first drew her skirts away and sniffed an orange stuffed with spices to keep off the smell of the jail. But Mistress Rastell pressed food on him, and exclaimed so pitifully to see how thin and heavy-eyed he looked that Robin soon began to laugh.

'Why, what a to-do!' he said. 'I grant you Newgate prison's not a palace, and that they feed you on mighty short commons. But we fared better than the prisoners

Dick tells of in his stories who lay in dungeons underground among toads and snakes !'

'Do tell us,' cried Meg More, 'what happened in Westminster Hall ! We heard the shouting and were wild to know what it was all about.'

'Well, I 'll do my best, but I 'm no troubadour.' Robin bit off a large mouthful of chicken and chewed it with great gusto. 'And indeed, it was very like an old tale in some parts ; and very comic in others. Master Skelton the poet ought to write of it.'

'Tilly-vally, boy, let 's have the tale straight and no more talking of it,' exclaimed downright Mistress More. So Robin took another bite of bread and began.

'When we came into the hall it seemed mighty dark, but soon our eyes got used to it. We couldn't miss seeing the king, purple as sunset and flaming with jewels, high on his throne ; and by him my Lord Cardinal like a setting sun with a black cloud across it, that was the frown on his face.'

'Why Robin,' said Meg More, 'you tell a tale like a poet yourself !'

'It 's the joy of freedom, Mistress Margaret,' said Robin, who was indeed beginning to be very excited. Perhaps the bright eager eyes of his young audience had something to do with it.

'Well,' he went on, 'there sat the king and the cardinal, and round them stood the great lords like a rainbow, but stern-faced as judges. Below in the hall the Lord Mayor and the aldermen, looking sulky, as well they might. Only I saw the face of good Master More, and he smiled a little secret smile that put hope into my heart. God bless him !' Robin dropped his bantering tone for a moment and choked a little—but pretended to have swallowed a crumb the wrong way.

'As for us,' he went on, 'we were as stinking and lousy a crew as ever you could wish to see, and more than one

dainty lord put up a pomander ball to his nose at the smell of us.' (Dame Alice hastily put down her orange.) 'More than one of us was snivelling, and our hands being bound we couldn't wipe our eyes or noses—which kept me from crying more than anything else. Then first spoke my Lord Cardinal, and sore he rated the mayor and aldermen—he might ha' been Brother Geoffrey, Dickon, when we made false quantities in our Latin. And one or two of the prisoners couldn't forbear to grin. At that the cardinal turned on us, and well you saw what he was by the names he laid on us. And ended by saying that all of us deserved death. Whereon down we all plumped on our knees and cried, "Mercy, gracious lord, mercy!" But the king frowned and shook his head, when the cardinal made as if he were pleading for us, but we couldn't hear what he said. And still the king made his face hard and refused. So our hearts began to sink; but I stole a look at Master More, and he was still smiling, so I didn't despair. And then—and then——'

Robin paused dramatically, a gnawed chicken bone in one hand and the last crust of his bread in the other.

'Go on!' burst from all the little girls at once.

'You 'll never believe me—but ask Master More if it was not so! In came three ladies, with their hair flowing loose about their shoulders, and who do you think they were? I didn't know, but an old grey-bearded knave near me gasped out their names as if they 'd been holy saints come down from heaven; and good saints indeed they were for us.'

Dick leaned over and pinched Robin.

'Will you tell us who they were!'

'Queen Catharine of England, and the king's sisters Margaret of Scotland and the Princess Mary, Duchess of Suffolk, that was one-time queen of France. Think o' that now—three queens to plead for the lives of us scurvy knaves!'

'Wow!' muttered Tom slyly. 'That was as good as a play indeed.'

'So then,' Robin went on, 'the king unbent his brows and smiled most graciously and so stood up and in a great voice proclaimed that we all were pardoned and should go free. At that the guards slid in among us and cut our wrists free, and we snatched the halters from our necks and threw them up to the rafters of the hall! Whereat the king and lords burst out a-laughing—and that was the end of it.' Robin swallowed the last of his bread!

'A good tale well told!'

They all looked up with a start, and there was Thomas More standing on the stairs and smiling at them. Tom jumped up to hand him into the boat.

'Sir,' he said in a low voice, 'you knew of this?'

'Well'—More sat down deliberately among his daughters and signed to the boatmen to put off—'I'll not deny that in some sort I had an inkling.'

'How much of it was your doing, father?' asked Meg, squeezing his arm.

'I may have dropped a hint or two,' More confessed. 'I was not always an old and grave lawyer, and I fear that in my youth, when I was a page in Cardinal Morton's household, I was greatly given to play acting. Now the king loveth a good masque, and when I did suggest that here we had the makings of a play wherein he might act a noble part—why, it liked him very well.'

'Then it was all planned before—his refusing, and the queens' pleading, and then his yielding?' said Dick disappointedly.

'The king did as the king chose to do—and he chose to have mercy. Isn't that enough?' More twinkled at him. Then he sighed. 'But I wish we could have played this play before so many died. I fear that the truly guilty—those that took part in the riot for nothing but loot or sheer ill will, have many of them escaped; while those that, like



John Lincoln, meant well by their fellow citizens, and those who were led into mischief through ignorance or bad luck, have suffered.'

That reminded Tom of what he had seen outside the hall, and he told More about it.

'Ah, the sly rogues!' More exclaimed. 'Somehow the word must have got about that the king was disposed to pardon and those that had not been prisoners crept among them so that they might claim a pardon too. Eh, it's an ill world and very full of craftiness, and sometimes I feel I'd like to sail away to mine own Utopia.'

'Well!' Rastell looked up merrily. 'The *Barbara* and the *Mary Barking* lie at Sandwich, being fitted for the summer's voyage. Who knows but we may find your Utopia beyond the New Found Lands? Will you sail with me, Thomas?'

Meg and Bess clutched each at a sleeve of their father's, and More laughed.

'There's my answer, John. Even if I could get quit of all my pother of public affairs, d'ye think I could sail away to Utopia and leave my wife and little ones behind me? But'—he turned suddenly grave—'if your mind is set on this voyage, I do advise you to make all speed to Sandwich and oversee the lading of your ships yourself. I've been hearing tales of John Ravyn, that you appointed purser to the *Barbara*.'

'My partner, Will Howting, has all that in hand,' said Rastell easily. 'Hallo, here we are at the Vintry stairs. Come home with me to supper, and let's drink to this happy ending of our anxieties!'

## CHAPTER XV

### HOT WATER FOR ROBIN

THAT evening came Richard Beekingham, who had arrived back in London to get news of Robin's imprisonment and release in one breath; and much upset he was to know that his nephew had been in such danger, and he away. He announced that he was riding to Guildford in two days' time to see his old friend Polstead, and would take Robin with him. He had thoughtfully sent off a messenger the moment the result of the inquiry was known, to set the father's mind at rest.

'But I think the sight of his son will be better medicine for him than all the physic of the apothecary,' he said. 'We 'll take it easy, Robin, for I see you are still weak. But the country air will soon bring the colour back to your cheeks.'

Dick's face fell, for he had looked forward to having a few more days with his friend. But his friend Martyn the schoolmaster so strongly urged him to continue preparing for his studies at Oxford, suggesting that he might enter Magdalen College in the autumn, that the parting did not seem so bad as it had done the first time.

And next morning Tom appeared, smiling ironically, with a scrawled letter, amazing<sup>v</sup> spelled, just come by messenger from his father.

'Mie deare sonne,' wrote Ned Elrington, 'Methingcks Londdon bee mor dangerus spott then Sheere, and I would sooner ye were with mee, not withstanding alle owlers, thanne amonge sutche restlesse and riotous foke. Therefore come ye hoom with alle speede ye may, and I will makke all rigt wyth Master Booltone. And yf ye do notte come straitwaye I will comme miself and give ye suche an hydinge as, I promis you, shalle makke the duste to flie

fromm yere breeches. Yere ever lovyng father, Edward Elrington.'

Elrington was, one ought to say, not to be greatly blamed for his spelling, since there were no dictionaries in those days; and every man spelled pretty much at will!

Tom had come to say good-bye, but hearing that Beckingham and Robin were leaving almost at once, he said that in that case he would join himself with them.

'Tell your father,' Rastell said to him, 'to have those cannon ready as soon as may be. I'll be wanting them by the end of June. I'll ride down in a few weeks' time to speak with him—but in the meanwhile you know all that's needful.'

So farewells were said—rather more cheerfully than the last time, for Dick was now turning his thoughts eagerly to Oxford, and Tom and Robin were both, for different reasons, glad to get out of London. Robin especially could not help a shiver as they rode under the gate of London Bridge, where some of the heads of those executed in the riots were rotting in the May sunshine. He put his hand uneasily up to his own neck. Tom looked at him slantwise, but said nothing.

Presently they were riding through the pleasant fields, sheeny with the gold of buttercups and starry with daisies.

'Ffh!' Robin sucked in a deep breath. 'How good it is to smell clean air! Beshrew me if I ever want to find myself inside London wall again.'

'Me also,' Tom agreed. 'Though to be sure we have been unlucky in our time there. But where there's too many folk the land sickens. The open country for me!'

'Look!' Robin cried delightedly. 'There's the first of the wild roses! It's almost summer.'

'You'll be content to spend your days in Guildford now?' asked Tom curiously.

Robin's face changed.

'I don't know 'bout that. I'm not in love with the

clothier's trade as you are with the ironworking, Tom. But I reckon I 'll have to put up with it. . A younger son must take what comes his way.'

He sounded so gloomy that Beckingham, who was riding ahead, turned to look sharply at him.

'That doesn't sound like you, Robin,' he said. 'But maybe you are tired after your three weeks in gaol.'

'That may be,' Robin forced a smile. 'But I wish, Uncle Beckingham, that my father had 'prenticed me to you rather than to my uncle Parkyn.'

'That was your mother's doing. However, it's done now, and if you watch your chances, boy, there's no reason why you shouldn't do well.'

'What chances have I,' said Robin gloomily, 'with my cousins Will and John to take first pick of my uncle's business? I 'll never have the money to set up on my own—and I don't know that I want to.'

'Oh, don't spoil the day by brooding!' cried Tom. 'When you've got your strength back, Robin, you 'll see things brighter.'

Robin made an effort and threw off his vague unhappiness. Very likely, he told himself, it was only because he was weakened by prison that the thought of his uncle's business was so hateful to him.

They rode south at an easy pace, and came to Guildford in the glory of early June. Tom wasted no time, but rode on straight for Shere, with the servant who had brought his father's letter. Robin spent one night with his father, who was now up and about, and overwhelmingly relieved to see him. Then he dutifully presented himself at Master Parkyn's house.

He was pleasantly surprised at the welcome he got. Master Rastell had taken the trouble to write a full account of how Robin had saved Dick from imprisonment, and suffered himself in consequence; and at first his aunt and uncle could not make enough of him. But this did not

hold for his cousins John and William. They were already somewhat jealous of their younger brother, who had most of the brains of the family, and resented the money their father was spending on his education. Now they were rapidly becoming almost as jealous of their cousin Robin.

At first Robin really tried to throw himself into learning the business. He was very soon his usual ruddy, sturdy self; but his experiences in London had somehow changed him. He had listened to men who had wider views and better education than the Guildford worthies, and though he did not in the least want to go back to London, he became more and more restless and dissatisfied.

He was critical, too, of his uncle's petty, cheese-paring ways, and his stupid, shortsighted cheating over the quality of the cloth he sold. One day he broke out to William, with whom he was packing a bale.

'This stuff has been overstretched!' he exclaimed. 'Look, here's a weak place—and here—and here! We shall get a bad name.'

'What other can we do?' said Will carelessly. 'If we don't overstretch our cloth, those rascals of Godalming will get ahead of us.'

'The end of it will be,' Robin said impatiently, 'that no one will buy West Surrey cloth at all. Now if we held to passing only good, sound cloth, we should soon win a name to be trusted.'

'And be ruined in the meanwhile!' Will sneered. 'Do you think you know better than my father what's good for trade?'

'Since he's been to London, Robin's too proud-stomached for business,' said sulky John who had overheard. 'He's seen the king and won His Majesty's notice, too.'

'It's a wonder he wasn't raised up high—as high as Temple Bar—at least the head of him,' added Will, and they both snickered at this rather poor piece of wit. Robin bit his lip and was silent.

It was not to be wondered at, Robin being no paragon but a very human boy, that he began to grow careless, and slacked his way through the days doing as little as possible. Whenever he could he slipped away to play cricket or throw dice with his old schoolfellows, many of whom were now apprenticed in the town; and he soon got a name for being an idle young dare-devil and the ringleader in every sort of mischief.

Toward the end of June Master Parkyn sent him, with another apprentice of his own age, to collect a bale of yarns from the cottagers in the Tillingbourne valley. Giles Hobson was a slow-witted youth who greatly admired the dashing Robin, and they both of them were in high spirits at getting away from the usual routine.

They rode out, each leading a pack pony, by the old road along the crest of Pewley Down, then dipped down through the woods of beech and oak into the lush valley, thick with buttercups and the tall white mist of cow-parsley.

At Albury fulling mill, above the dam where the swans bred then as they breed now, they collected a bale of cloth, and then rode on into the village. Here they got a cheerful welcome from the old women who sat with their spinning wheels at their doors, enjoying the summer sunshine. Robin was already a favourite with them, and was invited to drink home-made nettle beer and parsnip wine, or take a bite of barley bread and strong goat's-milk cheese. He jested with them about their work and pretended to find fault with it, but they knew very well that he was new to the job and not likely to be over particular.

It may have been the parsnip wine—potent stuff when taken after a hot ride—but by the time they had made their rounds Robin's face was flushed and his eyes bright with mischief.

'It's early to go home yet,' he said to Giles. 'Let's make a day of it, and visit Elrington's ironworks over

beyond Shere. It 's long since I had a word with my old friend Tom.'

'Nay, but, Mus' Robin!' Giles's pale blue eyes opened wide. 'It 'll be dusk afore we 're back in Guildford if we do that.'

'Are you afraid?' Robin laughed. 'Do you think the owlers will stop us for such poor wares as we 've got here?'

'I 'm more afeard of Mus' Parkyn's stick across my back,' admitted Giles, 'or Mus' John's—he do lay on something terrible.'

Robin twitched his shoulders. He had lively recollections of his cousin's beatings. But for all that he couldn't bring himself to miss the chance of meeting Tom.

'Well, tell you what, Giles,' he suggested. 'I 'll be quicker if I ride alone, so do you bide here with the packs. I 'll be back in two hours at most, and we 'll still be home before dusk.'

'Well, as you say, Mus' Robin!' Giles was tired with the ride, and sleepy with the drinks, and quite willing to stretch himself out in the shade of the woods just beyond Albury, while the tethered pack ponies grazed contentedly.

Robin kicked his pony into a canter and sped gaily along the dusty road. The new brick houses of wealthy landowners thrust their twisted chimneys up amid the trees of their parks, the old wattle-and-daub cottages of Shere huddled crazily one against the other. If one fell down, another of much the same kind was built in its place. So it had been for hundreds of years, and so it would be for some hundreds of years more. Robin did not think the hovels at all picturesque—in fact, he turned up his nose at them, as he rode by; but he did admire Sir Edmund Bray's fine mansion on the hillside, and the long gabled front of Squire Weston's 'place' with the home farm beyond.

It was further than he remembered to Abinger on the other side of Gomshall, and his conscience gave a prick as

he realized that it would certainly be more than the promised two hours before he was back at Albury. However, having come so far he was determined to go on, and at last heard the 'bong—tock! bong—tock!' of the smithy hammers, and hoped Tom would not be too busy to welcome him.

There was quite a crowd round about the forge as Robin rode up—Sir Edmund Bray, his son and daughter (Robin noticed that Beatrice had grown a good deal since he last saw her at the bear-baiting, nearly nine months ago), Ned Elrington and his master workman, two grinning 'prentices, Tom, very grimy and extremely pleased with himself, and—

'By cock and pyc!' said Robin, to himself, using an expression he had picked up in London, 'if it 's not Master Rastell! I've come at a good time.'

He clattered down on them with a shout of greeting, at which Tom looked up and waved, and young Will Rastell pranced. Sir Edmund looked blank until Beatrice nudged him and reminded him of the boy who had distinguished himself at the bear-baiting, then he smiled kindly.

Now, Robin could see what they were all staring at. Neatly laid out on straw were six newly finished naval cannon—two demi-culverins and four falconets; and Ned Elrington gloated over them like a hen over new-hatched chicks.

Robin slid off his pony and led it up to where Tom stood. His friend grinned at him, and then turned to contemplate the guns with as much satisfaction as his father.

'Knew we could do it,' he muttered. 'Though if only we 'd ha' had my water-hammer——'

'Mind they don't burst on ye at the first round, John,' said Sir Edmund between jest and earnest, and Ned Elrington scowled.

'They 're well tested at every joint,' he said, 'and if any of them burst—unless any of your careless mariners get



them 'over-hot,' of course—I 'll give ye leave to use my head as a cannon ball.'

'I 'm satisfied—and with the price too,' laughed Rastell. 'I 'd never have got them made so good and cheap by any other. I think, though, Master Elrington, your prices will go up after this.'

'I 'll tell ye one thing, my masters,' spoke up Elrington, 'without my boy Tom here'—his hand came down heavily on Tom's shoulder—'I doubt if I could ha' brought it off. He kept his eyes open that while he was in London, and brought back a trick or two that made all clear. He 'll make a better ironmaster than his father, and I don't care who hears me say it.'

'The old man 's vaif as a peacock in his pride just now,' Tom murmured to Robin. 'But let me but swing the hammer wrong to-morrow, and see how he 'll lay into me!'

'Well, to-morrow we 'll load them into the wagons, and I 'll see them safe to Sandwich,' Rastell said. 'Next week I hope to be aboard with all my stores, and given a fair wind we 'll be off on our venture in a fortnight. Too long I 've delayed already.'

'If it 'd save you time, Mus' Rastell,' suggested Elrington, 'I 'll send Tom along with them, and do you go back to finish your plans in London.'

'He 's full young for such a charge,' Rastell said doubtfully.

'He 's got a long head on 's shoulders, and knows what 's needful,' declared Elrington. 'With your men to guard and Tom to direct the guns 'll be as safe as with you. I 'd go myself but I 've a middlin' lot o' work on hand——'

'I 'll think it over,' promised Rastell. 'But I 'd like Tom to come, if you can spare him, whether I go myself or not.'

'And it 's supper time now,' Bray put in. 'Come, Rastell, come, children, we must be going. Elrington, if you can spare the time, we might have a further word

about that hammer-pond one o' these days. I'm beginning to see that it might be worth my while——'

'You've been a long time bringing your mind to it,' scowled Elrington.

'I don't know yet that I'm settled in mind about it,' Bray said quickly. 'But come and see me.'

'Aye, well, maybe when I'm not so busy.'

And so they parted. Tom dug Robin in the ribs.

'That's father all over! No sooner does he see his heart's wish within reach but he pretends he don't want it. But he'll have his hammer-pond right soon, or I'm much mistook!'

'Oh, Tom!' Robin burst out, 'are you really going to see the ships and the sea? What luck some folk do have!'

'I wish you were coming with me, Robin! I suppose there's no chances? How goes it with you—and how's the wool trade?'

Robin morosely explained just how much he hated the whole thing, and Tom duly sympathized. From this they settled to a good long gossip about everything that had happened in the four weeks since they had met, until Robin with a start realized how low the sun was in the sky.

'My faith!' he exclaimed, 'I've left young Giles at Albury these three hours and more. It'll be dark by the time we're half-way home—and wow! I can just feel my cousin's stick about my shoulders! I'd best be riding back to get it over. I must see to it that poor Giles isn't blamed.'

'You'll surely catch it,' Tom grinned.

'Oh, well, I'm used to it!' Robin swung himself on his pony and galloped back toward Shere. His heart was too full of envy of Tom—doing the work he loved and with the promise of a most exciting journey—to fret himself about the well-deserved punishment he was certain to get. But when he reached the place where he had left Giles, and found no sign of him, he did have a shock of uneasiness.

'He's either ridden home—and very wise of him—or he's gone into some cottage to wait me there,' he thought.

Giles was not in any of the cottages, nor did any one remember seeing him and his ponies pass back through the village. Robin began to feel distinctly uneasy. He made up his mind, however, that the boy must certainly have grown tired of waiting, or afraid perhaps of Master Parkyn's anger, and have made for Guildford. The best thing Robin could do was to follow him at his fastest pace.

As he had foreseen, the dark came upon him as he was crossing the ridge of Pewley. But a young moon made enough light to pick his way by, and though he had to slow to a trot he made good enough progress. Just as he came to where the road dipped down toward Guildford, he heard a most distressful sound ahead of him.

Someone was sobbing to himself, sobbing miserably, in bursts interrupted by panting breaths. Then Robin made out, just in front, a shambling, stumbling figure that tried to run, terrified evidently of the approaching horse. Just as Robin came up the figure stumbled and fell.

'Ah! Ah!' gasped a voice Robin knew. 'Don't 'ee do me no harm! I been robbed already—I got nothing more——'

'Giles!' cried Robin. 'What's happened?'

'Eh, is it you, Mus' Robin! Thank God for that. I've been so feared—what ever did come of you, Mus' Robin?'

'The pack ponies! Where are they? Have you lost them?' exclaimed Robin impatiently.

'I been robbed o' them! Robbed as I lay sleeping. Three men came out o' the wood and clapped hold o' me afore I'd time to get awake proper—and they drove off the ponies and beat me sore and left me lying there. And you never came!' Giles broke out blubbering.

'Oh, Giles!' Robin was aghast. 'Look here, don't take on so—it was all my fault, and I'll say so to my uncle. I

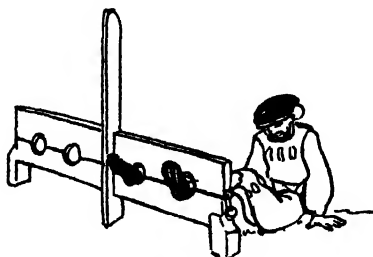
never should ha' left you! Look, come up behind me—the pony 'll carry two downhill.'

Giles scrambled up.

'I know I ought to ha' kept better watch,' he whimpered. 'But who 'd ha' thought—in broad daylight—oh, Mus' Robin, do keep Mus' Parkyn from turning me away! My poor mother 's a widow, and she 've spent all her savings to get me 'prenticed—do please plead for me, Mus' Robin!'

'I 'll do my best,' Robin promised, 'and indeed, Giles, you weren't to blame. Now do be quiet, or you 'll scare the pony.'

So, soberly and very much afraid, the two boys jogged down the steep hill and into Guildford.



THE STOCKS

## CHAPTER XVI

### BREAK AWAY

ROBIN expected a violent row when he confessed to his uncle, but the storm that broke over him was beyond anything he had imagined. When he had told his story, his uncle sat silent for a full minute behind his counting-house table, his lean, wrinkled face growing redder and redder and his eyes narrowing to mere slits. John and William, standing behind him, looked at one another, and Robin saw William deliberately wink at his brother. John's sulky mouth twisted into a pleased grin, before he drew his thick brows down and put on a ferocious scowl. William assumed a fine glare of righteous indignation. But Robin had seen what he had seen, and knew that his cousins were delighted at his disgrace.

Then Master Parkyn opened his mouth, and beginning in low tones that gradually rose to a scream, he told Robin what he thought of his escapade. He was a worthless, idle, villainous good-for-naught. He thought himself too good to be an honest clothier, but he had not enough honesty to look after his master's goods. He presumed on the fact that his master was his uncle. He never had been worth the meat he ate, and he never would be. He was a fool and a blockhead. Let him not think that because, out of the pride and naughtiness of his heart, he had mixed himself up with the London riot, and by accident done his cousin a service, he could behave in decent, law-abiding Guildford town as though he were a young lord! Flogging was too good for such as he. He deserved to be set in the stocks. He deserved to be dismissed!

'And do we really know,' asked William sulkily, as his father paused for breath, 'that the wool was stolen? At least, we know that it was stolen—but by whom?'

'How should I know?' began Robin indignantly. Then he suddenly saw what William meant, and red fire danced in front of his eyes.

'Are you saying,' he got out slowly, the words sticking in his throat, 'that I am—a thief?'

'It's a mighty unlikely tale that you've brought us,' said William. Master Parkyn slewed round in his chair and looked up at his younger son in a surprised way. Then he turned again on Robin and nodded solemnly several times.

'Aye,' he said more quietly, 'a mighty unlikely tale. I for one do not believe it in the least.'

'And what should I do with your scurvy wool?' burst out Robin furiously.

'Why nothing, to be sure. But there are others who might pay a gold piece for two packloads of good woollen yarn.'

'If it's the owlers you're thinking of,' Robin said, 'no doubt, it was they who stole it—o' purpose to get me into trouble! Well you know they've a grudge against us for the part we played last autumn. Look what happened to Tom Elrington.'

'As for that, we've only his word. And what a mischief anyway were you doing out of your bed that night, to fall in with owlers at all? A fly-by-night and a flibbertigibbet with a liking for ill company, you are, nephew! I've no use for a 'prentice that can't be trusted, and so I shall tell your father. You may be my sister's son, but I'll not bide your pride and your laziness—least of all will I bide your dishonesty.'

'Are you——' Robin spoke hoarsely, 'are you breaking my apprenticeship?'

'A man has a right to break an ill bargain. I shall bring the matter before the guild.'

Robin stood silent, thinking it out. There was something behind all this. He did not believe that his uncle

really thought he was a thief, but it was clear that for some reason he wanted to get rid of him. Well, let him! The hot rage surged up in his heart again. As if he would stay, after the evil words that had been put upon him!

'Well!' he broke out fiercely. 'Very well! You can do as you please, uncle. But I'll never sweep your floor or mind your quills or stretch your warps again! No, nor I won't take another flogging from John there—and so you can tell the guildmaster and all the burgesses. So there!'

He flung open the counting-house door and dashed out into the dark yard. He had no idea where he was going—he only knew that he could not bear another night under his uncle's roof. Through the yard and out into the side lane he ran blindly, his chest heaving and tears of sheer fury in his eyes. Without thinking he charged into the High Street, under the arch of the Fish Cross which formed a shelter for sellers of fish in the middle of the road, and there flung himself on the flags to storm out his temper by himself.

Spite of his red hair, it was not often that Robin really lost control of himself. He did now! The unfairness of it, the injustice, the lying accusations—what had he done, what *had* he done to deserve it? Careless and disobedient—yes, he admitted that. He would have taken a flogging with set lips as no more than his due. Even the stocks he was prepared to endure, though all the little boys of Guildford threw mud and rotten vegetables at him. But to call him a thief! Robin pounded his fists on the stone, and called his uncle every bad name he could think of.

'Robertus! Robertus! What is this shameful talk? I never thought to hear the like from you!' came a stern, well-known voice. Robin looked up to see the dark shape of Brother Geoffrey outlined against one of the arches. He fell silent at once, feeling rather ashamed of himself.

'What is the matter?' asked the schoolmaster more

mildly, coming under the stone canopy. 'Tell me, my son.'

Well, Brother Geoffrey was as good a man as any to tell his woes to. Robin stood up, gulped once or twice, and poured out his story. It was easier to tell in the dark. Brother Geoffrey sat down on the stone bench that ran along one wall, and listened without a word till it was done. Then he said merely:

'H'm.'

'I know I have been to blame, sir,' Robin admitted candidly. 'But why—why call me——' he could not bring himself to say the word.

'It's quite clear that your uncle wants to be rid of you,' said Brother Geoffrey. 'You have not been a profitable apprentice to him—but I think that is not all.'

'Then what?' asked Robin.

'I cannot certainly say.' The voice out of the dark came thoughtfully. 'But I think there are several reasons. First—your eyes are too sharp.'

'Meaning the matter of the stretched cloth?'

'That, among other things. The trouble, Robert, is not that you are a thief, but that you are too honest. God forbid you should be otherwise. But there is another thing—Master Parkyn has lost money over that lawsuit of his concerning the land at Stoughton—which I always said was a foolish thing and very ill-advised. He'll be turning away some of his journeymen soon, or I am very much mistaken. And lastly—he went to your father to borrow money, and your father denied him. He said he had paid enough to apprentice you, and little good had come of it so far. So—they quarrelled.'

'Father said nothing of this to me—though I thought he spoke somewhat coldly of uncle when I was last at home,' said Robin thoughtfully. 'So—my uncle is paying out my poor father through me. And now, what am I going to do?'



'I am grieved about this, Robertus. And I must tell you plainly that you are to blame.'

'I know I am,' said Robin frankly. 'If I had minded my work better, and most of all if I hadn't played the fool yesterday, I shouldn't have given my uncle this chance. But—oh, sir, except for my father, I can't be sorry! If you did but know how I hate, *hate* the clothier business!'

'That is very foolish talk,' said Brother Geoffrey. 'It is a good honest trade and a very necessary one. What! Would you have us go clad in skins like savages?'

'That 's all very well,' protested Robin, 'but there is too much cheating and lying for my liking.'

'You could learn your trade well and set up for yourself as an honourable merchant.'

'I fear,' said Robin ruefully, 'that I am too stupid.'

'You are not stupid, Robertus. Only lacking in diligence.'

Robin felt that this talk was getting uncomfortable. He was tired, sleepy, and hungry, and he wanted to be left alone to decide what to do next. But he respected Brother Geoffrey too much to be rude to him.

'I do not know how to advise you,' the schoolmaster went on more gently. 'I think the trouble is that you are not built for anything that Guildford has to offer you. But it is growing late, too late for you to reach your father's house to-night. Come with me to the friary and sleep on it. To-morrow we will see what is to be done.'

They went down through the summer night, Robin half asleep on his feet. He just managed to make his bow to the kindly old prior, who turned him over to the guest-master without further ado. With a hot spiced milk posset inside him, Robin dropped down on the hard pallet in the bare dormitory, and was asleep even as he fell.

He came awake suddenly and completely, in the first flush of a bright midsummer morning. His head was quite clear and his tiredness had all gone. The sound of

singing from the chapel—rather thin and quavery, for there were barely a dozen brothers in the friary, and all, except Brother Geoffrey the schoolmaster, were old—told him that the friars were at prayer.

Robin knew now exactly what he meant to do, but he was sure Brother Geoffrey would not approve of it. He thought it very likely that, if he told his father, easy-going Thomas Polstead would be ready enough to agree, but his mother was likely to argue. All things considered, Robin decided to cut the arguments, which would only waste time, and carry out his plan without consulting any one. Now was the time, before the service ended.

The guest-house dormitory was divided by a strip of grass from the main building, and there were no other guests. No one saw Robin as, not stopping even to wash his face in the inviting bucket of water that stood by the well, he stole out softly to the great gate which faced the lane by the river. The gates were locked—but what was that to Robin? Over he went like a cat.

The town was still asleep, for it was very early. In Master Parkyn's stable was Robin's own pony, his father's gift—forgotten in his wild dash last night. If he were seen taking it, what of it? No one could keep from him what was his own. As a matter of fact, no one did see him, and the chained watch-dog who knew him well, only stirred lazily and wagged his tail as Robin's caressing hand patted his shaggy head. Jenny the pony whinneyed softly as Robin led her out, and shook herself all over with pleasure. Robin threw a leg over her back and trotted out of the yard. As he went a casement opened above, and the surly voice of his cousin John called suspiciously:

'Who 's there?'

Robin only answered with a laugh. Next moment he was climbing the steep hill beside the castle, the hill that led to the open downs between him and the Winterbourne valley.

For the thing that had come so clearly into his mind as he opened his eyes that morning was that Master Rastell's wagons were to start that day on the journey into Kent, to where the *Barbara* and the *Mary Barking* lay at anchor. Would he be in time?

At an inn near Abinger he left Jenny, giving the landlord money to send her back to his father with a hastily scrawled note saying that he was safe and well. He had a sharp pang of conscience at this point, but stifled it, telling himself that in the end his parents would be glad of his venture. Then on foot he made his way by by-paths to Abinger and the Elrington forge.

Much now depended on luck. Robin was prepared as a last resort to tell the whole story to Master Elrington and ask for his help; but he preferred to take no grown-up person into his confidence at this stage. If he could catch Tom alone, that would be best of all; but if not, he would have to carry out his plans as best he could.

Lurking in the bushes by the clearing where the forge stood, he could see the two wagons standing ready packed by the wayside, each one with a canvas tilt. No one was about, but smoke went up from the Elrington house. Probably all were having their breakfast in preparation for an early start. This was a chance too good to miss! Very cautiously, crouching behind gorse and bramble and occasionally going down on hands and knees, Robin edged his way nearer and nearer to the wagons, keeping a sharp look-out all the time for any serving men who might be quietly on the watch. No one seemed to be near. After all, the noise made by any one who tried to make off with a cart, or the heavy goods it contained, would be quite enough to give the alarm.

Closer still Robin crept. Now for it! Quick as a lizard he darted across the few yards of open space, leaped at the tail-board, pulled himself up and slithered in under the tilt. The guns were wrapped in canvas and laid on straw.

It was not an easy matter to clear a space between them and the side of the wagon, without making a sound that would bring someone at a run to see what was happening; but Robin contrived it at last, wriggled himself in under the straw, and pulled a loose flap of canvas over him. By the time he was settled the sun was coming up behind the hills, and stamping and jingling warned him that the horses were being led from their stables to be hitched to the long wagon poles.

It was stuffy and cramped where he lay, and the straw tickled his nose and ears and pricked him in every exposed place. Robin very much wanted to sneeze, but he knew the trick of a finger firmly pressed on his upper lip, and kept the irritation at bay. Now the whole place seemed suddenly alive. Carters shouted and chaffed, the horses trampled, snorted, and jingled their harness, and the whole wagon in which Robin lay shook and heaved as they were were backed into their places. He heard the voice of Master Elrington, loud and hoarse, and Tom's slow drawl that told he was pleased and excited. Master Rastell he did not hear—probably he had taken Elrington's advice and gone back to London, whence he would join the ship later at Sandwich. So much the better, Robin thought.

There were, of course, a lot of last-minute delays—things forgotten and sent for in a hurry, arguments about which was the best road to take, and what hostelrys were the best to put up at. Burdens of all sorts and sizes were tossed in, and Robin found himself more safely buried than he had dared to hope for—luckily nothing hard or intolerably heavy was slung on top of him! He felt the driver climb into his place at the front, and someone else—not Tom, he would be riding, Robin reflected—scrambled up behind. There was a great cracking of whips, shouts of farewell, and with a swish, a rumble, and a piercing squeak of the wooden wheels, the wagons started on their way.

## CHAPTER XVII

### PORT O' SANDWICH

'WELL, I 'll be hanged!'

Tom, for once in his life, was completely taken aback. He stared with dropped jaw at the untidy figure—straws in its hair and all over its clothes, dust on its face and dark rings under its eyes, that sat and grinned with weary impudence on a culverin.

'Bring me a drink of water, as you are a true friend,' croaked the apparition.

'Ye deserve to starve, ye rascal!' snorted Tom. 'But I 'll do more for ye than ye deserve—and then we 'll see.'

He disappeared, and Robin, exhausted and aching all over with cramp and jolting, dropped his head in his hand as he waited. All day long he had fought hunger and thirst, forcing himself to lie still even at the midday halt, when tantalizing sounds of gulping and chewing nearly drove him wild. But when toward evening they came to a halt near Reigate, he knew he could stand no more. He summoned up his last scrap of cheek to greet Tom with, but by the time his friend returned with a large horn mug of milk Robin could manage no more than a shadowy smile. The long, creamy drink, however, put new heart into him, and he lowered his head after draining it with his old familiar grin—heightened by a white ring round his mouth.

'Now then!' said Tom, trying to be stern. But the goblin figure was too much for him, and he suddenly went off into a great roar of laughter that startled his companions and brought them clustering round to see what was up. Robin knew that, at least for the present, he had won.

'I must eat before I tell my story,' he announced, wiping his mouth with his dusty sleeve, which did not much improve matters, and clambering stiffly down into the inn yard. 'Besides, this is not the time and place for secrets of state.'

'You young——!' Tom began, controlling his laughter. Then he decided to play up, and nodded solemnly. 'I understand,' he said with deep meaning, for the benefit of the carters. 'We will talk of this within.' And linking his arm in Robin's he walked with him into the inn, where Master Rastell's head servant was bargaining for beds.

The food at the inn was plain and rough, but Robin made up for his long fast by an enormous meal. Afterwards he drew Tom into a corner and poured out all his tale.

'And so ye see,' he finished, 'it's not possible for me to stay with my uncle Parkyn any longer. That he should dare call *me* a thief! He that cheats his cottage spinners by paying them in pins and buckles and cheap trinkets instead of good money, and stretching his cloth till you can all but see through it! How he came to have a sister like my mother, and a son like our Dickon, it beats me to think! Jack and Will are all of a piece with him.'

'And so,' said Tom slowly, 'you think Mus' Rastell'll take you on his ship to seek your fortune?'

'If *he* won't, I'll find someone that will!' Robin shut his lips firmly. 'I'm determined to go to sea, whatever comes of it!'

'M'm. After all, ye might do worse,' was Tom's verdict. 'Though, mind you, I think you were a fool to run off. Why couldn't you go to your father and tell him all?'

'Oh, Tom, father can't stand that sort of to-do! He'd hate to fall out with Uncle Parkyn—and mother would be in such a taking, 'twould ha' been all talk, talk, talk, and I'd ha' missed my chance of sailing with Master Rastell.'

'Something in that,' pondered Tom. 'Anyway, here

you be, and you 'll ha' to come on with us to Sandwich and bide what time brings.'

So the next day Robin rode with Tom on a hired nag, and found it much pleasanter than being jolted to pieces in the wagon. It was a slow journey, for the laden wagons made no more than a walking pace. The boys became heartily tired of it, and were glad when at last they rumbled over the Stour bridge, paid their tolls under the Barbican, and saw the masts rising up from the harbour of the famous Cinque Port of Sandwich.

Robin was feeling distinctly nervous. He had had time to think over his escapade, and was by no means so sure as he had been that Master Rastell would give him a welcome. However, here he was, and he was going through with it.

They found Master Rastell at his inn, deep in talk with a long, brown-faced, black-bearded man with one eye. Tom nudged Robin as they entered and whispered: 'That 's the man Ravyn I told you of. Hasn't he the face of a proper villain?'

Robin certainly did not like the look of him. A stormy argument seemed to be going on between Rastell and Ravyn, and Rastell was by no means his usual pleasant self. Something had put him out badly, and Robin's heart went down into his boots. This did not look like a good time to be asking favours!

'I tell you you 've had time a-plenty!' Rastell was saying as the boys entered. 'No bricks, say you! Who ever heard the like! You should ha' seen to that cooking hearth 'fore ever the ships left the Thames. We 'll never be off at this rate.'

Here a mild-mannered man, whom neither of the boys had seen before, intervened.

'Good Master Rastell,' he said soothingly, 'our purser Ravyn has had much to see to. It has been no easy task to find mariners enough to man two ships—and then the

laying up of stores and the stowing of cargo—'tis no wonder something was overlooked. And after all, the guns are not arrived yet——'

Here Tom coughed, and they all looked round. Rastell broke into a laugh.

'Why, Tom lad, you come pat upon your cue, like the Devil in the old play!' he exclaimed. 'Well, Master Howting, this means that the guns at least are here, for this is Master Thomas Elrington. He's a young man of parts, let me tell you, and the day will come—why, by all the saints, who's here? Our adventurous Robin! Have ye come to join my ship, young sir, in spite of your uncle the clothier?'

'Just so,' said Robin, getting it out in two words.

Rastell stared, and saw that the boy was serious.

'What! Have ye quarrelled with your uncle? or what brings you?'

'He called me a thief,' answered Robin.

'That you were not, I'll go bail. I must have all the tale from you—but not now, for we must get those guns aboard straightway. Now, Ravyn, I'll hear no more excuses. Get that hearth made two days from now, or I'll seek another purser!'

Ravyn, with a very ill grace and a curt, 'Fare ye well, then!' got up and left them.

'I do think ye are over-hasty with the man,' began Master Howting anxiously. 'And as for getting another purser, where will ye find one at this hour? We shall be delayed yet longer, and never sail this year.'

'The man has parts, I grant you, but too high a notion of himself,' said Rastell getting up. 'He needs putting in his place, and you're too soft with him, my friend. Come, come, let us go see the cannon!'

The rest of that day was one long bustle, and Robin, his fate still unsettled, found himself trotting at the heels of Rastell here, there, and everywhere, fetching and carrying, running errands, scrambling up the side of the *Barbara*,



tumbling down hatchways, being laughed at or sworn at by sailors, and losing his way until his head was in a whirl. The cannon were set in their places under the direction of Tom, who was very cool and competent about it. Pots and pans, and kettles, stores of salted meat, cheeses, barrels of ship biscuit, and so forth kept on arriving and having to be stored away, until Robin privately thought that if they got away that year they would be lucky.

'And now,' Master Rastell threw himself back on the settle of the inn as evening closed in on a bewildering day, 'come hither, my adventurous boy, and tell me what I am to do with you.'

'Take me with you.' Robin drew up a stool and sat down at Master Rastell's knee.

'Well, you must show me good cause.'

So Robin launched again into his story, and Rastell pursed his lips and pulled down his eyebrows and looked so stern that Robin's heart failed, and he saw himself packed off back to Guildford with his tail between his legs. He faltered and came to a stop.

'Well,' said Rastell after a horrid silence, 'but for one thing I'd ha' sent you back to your uncle to get the beating you deserve. *But*—he should not have called you a thief, being himself very little better.'

'How do you know?' asked Robin astonished, for he had said nothing about his uncle's sly cheating.

'He let out a deal to Master More, when he was trying to cozen him into giving help over his lawsuit. So—I don't think it's for your good, Robin, to let you go back to him. I'll stand by my word, and you shall come with me.'

Robin promptly fell backward off his stool.

'However,' Master Rastell went on as the boy picked himself up, grinning and blushing, 'don't think you'll have an easy time of it, young sir! You'll come as cabin boy, to wait on me and Master Howting, and you'll help the ship's cook and be kicked and cursed by the mariners

and earn your keep in any way you can. And if you're sick you must e'en abide it, for there'll be none to pity you. So now you know, and make your mind up.'

'It's made,' said Robin, naturally not in the least dismayed.

'Then shake hands on it, and be off with you to bed.'

'Sir,' Robin said gravely, putting his square paw into Rastell's supple, long-fingered printer's hand, 'I'll serve you as well as I know how.'

'So he's taking you—I thought he would,' was Tom's comment in their cubby-hole under the roof that night. 'Good luck to you—and just wait till you get into the Channel! I'll lay you'll be praying Master Rastell to throw you overboard and let you swim to dry land.'

Robin threw a bolster at him.

It was three days before the cooking hearth was complete, and then there was a further delay because two of the men hired by Ravyn deserted. Robin had had time to see something of the crew, and on the whole he did not like the looks of them. He knew nothing about the mariner's craft, of course, but he could not help noticing that several of the so-called sailors seemed to know very little about their job; and he was confirmed in this when he heard the boatswain swear that most of them did not know one end of a marline-spike from another, and were better acquainted with the hangman's rope than with a ship's cable. Master Rastell was impatient to be off, and said that they would sail short-handed and take their chance of picking up a couple of men at Falmouth. But at the last minute Ravyn came aboard with one more recruit.

Robin was busy in the master's cabin, swabbing the floor on which a clumsy sailor had upset a bucket of water, and he did not see them come aboard. In any case he was not interested. What did catch his attention was a change in the noises on deck above, a clanging rattle like that of a chain, and a difference in the heave and swing

under his feet to which he had become used while the *Barbara* rode at anchor. A sort of quiver ran through all the vessel, and she heeled over slightly to one side. Robin sprang to the porthole. There were the spires and gables of Sandwich, the wharf and the busy shipping that he had seen every day for three days past—but they were smaller, fainter, and growing smaller yet. Between them and the ship was a widening stretch of dancing water. The anchor was up and the voyage was begun!

Robin dashed up on deck in wild excitement. Rastell and Howting stood on the high poop, the wind blowing out their hair and the feathers in their plumed caps, and their cloaks pulled closely round them. Robin had the sense to stay humbly in the waist of the ship with the crew, most of whom had crowded to the rail and were looking shorewards with a certain wistfulness. The old hands grinned at them and spat contemptuously.

Kerchiefs and caps were waving from the wharf, but Robin had no one on shore to wish him God-speed. Tom had gone back to Surrey two days ago, with a long letter from Master Rastell to Robin's father, assuring him that his son was in good hands, and would be well cared for. As he watched the shore recede, and felt the chill air out of the north-east which tossed the waves into white plumes, Robin realized suddenly that he was going far from home, to a new world over leagues of empty sea, with a crowd of men not one of whom, save Master Rastell, could be called a friend. In that moment his heart, like his back, felt suddenly cold.

And it did not cheer him at all when a voice he had all but forgotten, but now remembered all too well, drawled in his ear:

'So, Master Robin Polstead! We are to be comrades after all.'

Looking round sharply, Robin met the squinting, close-set eyes of Peter Coo.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### OUTWARD BOUND

FOR a moment the two stared at each other, then Peter began to wriggle backwards through the crowd at the bulwarks, jerking his thumb at Robin to follow him. Robin did so, warily. It was a shock to find Coo here—evidently he was the one brought on board by Ravyn that morning. But Coo was apparently just as surprised to meet Robin.

‘Now don’t you make no mistake about me,’ Peter began, clinging to a ratline to steady himself against the lurch of the ship. ‘I’m sorry for my sins, I am. I aim to be an honest man henceforward, amen. I seen the folly o’ my ways in London, and I’ve repented, I have, and come aboard to lead a new life. So don’t you go telling no tales, Master Robin, and spoiling my chances. Let bygones be bygones, and help a poor fellow to turn over a new leaf, do now!’

Robin looked at him thoughtfully. Was he lying? Very likely. Was there any use in telling Master Rastell—who, it must be remembered, did not know Peter Coo by sight—the sort of scoundrel he had got aboard? On the whole, Robin was inclined to give Coo the benefit of the doubt. The creature was looking very white and wretched, and clung to the ratline as though he could scarcely stand—which was no wonder, as the ship, moving towards the open sea, began to catch the full force of the north-east wind and danced merrily.

‘Well——’ Robin paused, then went on deliberately. ‘So long as you behave yourself, I’ll say naught. If you *can* be an honest man, Peter, it won’t be me that stops you.’

‘Th-thanks, Master Robin!’ gulped Peter. His face had now turned pale green, and he made a hasty dive for the side of the ship, where several more of the raw crew

were already hanging miserably overside and throwing up their breakfast. Robin laughed—he was feeling very well himself—and went off to finish his duties. He guessed it would be some time before Coo would be fit for any mischief!

Certainly for the first couple of days, as the *Barbara* and the *Mary Barking* went bucking westward down the Channel, the new hands were, in the words of the boatswain, 'about as much use as a boatload of rotten herrings—and stank like such.' They lay about in heaps, moaning, or struggled to their duties under the kicks of the regular sailors, swearing and being sick alternatively. Masters Howting and Rastell lay in their bunks ministered to by Robin, who continued to be aggressively well.

'Curse your red cheeks, you grinning imp!' groaned Rastell, as Robin helped him to sip brandy-and-water. 'How dare you look so full of cheer, and me with my stomach heaving at every bounce of this confounded tub? Had I the strength I'd smash this glass in your face!'

'Lucky you haven't, Master Rastell, for it's our last one,' returned Robin. 'You'll ha' to drink out of pewter if this goes. But if my smile vexes you, why, I'll weep.'

'Nay, don't do that, for we've salt water enough aboard. Leave me alone—I'll sleep if I can. Go tend poor Master Howting.'

Master Howting, indeed, was in a sorry state. He was sure he was going to die, and gave Robin all sorts of messages for his wife and children. Then he asked for a priest to shrive him, but the ship's parson lay speechless in his bunk; so Master Howting decided that he would have to live.

By the third day, however, things were looking better. Master Rastell had found his sea legs, and Master Howting was able to crawl out of his bunk, though he could not yet face food. The sea-sick lubbers, too, were mostly on their

feet and beginning to have a rough idea of their duty; on the fourth day they made Falmouth harbour. Six men promptly deserted.

John Ravyn lurched into the cabin with this news just as Rastell, Howting, and the master were sitting down, with Robin in attendance, to the first meal they had really been able to enjoy since leaving Sandwich.

'They lubbers be no great loss,' was the master's verdict. 'But we can't sail six hands short. You 'll ha' to go ashore, Ravyn, and either fetch 'em back or pick us up six others. Falmouth breeds handy seamen—try if you can get us some better stuff this time.'

'I 'll do my best,' said Ravyn gruffly but he seemed cheerful enough as he dropped into the jolly-boat and made for shore. Robin guessed he was glad to set foot on dry land.

They had not meant to stay long in Falmouth—only long enough to take on board some last stores and overhaul the ships for the Atlantic crossing. But Ravyn was a long time finding men to replace the deserters. He reported that Falmouth men did not like the idea of a voyage to the north-west; only fishermen went to the New Found Land waters; a trading voyage was absurd, for who was there to trade with? However, he would do his best.

The delay was not good for the crew. On the first day they had plenty to do, cleaning the ship and re-stowing cargo that had got shifted, splicing strained ropes and generally making all shipshape; but after that idleness set in, and of course, grumbles and bickerings began.

Robin, when not needed in the cabin, made friends with the old sailors and set about learning all he could. He was determined not to be a 'landlubber' a minute longer than he could help! So he learned the names of ropes and sails much faster than he had ever learned Latin verbs, mastered knotting and splicing, and was soon scrambling

up the ratlines like a monkey. The old hands liked him, and vowed he was already a better sailor than any of the rubbish brought aboard by Ravyn.

So the days passed, and Rastell fretted and fumed at the delay. The men got drunk on shore, and brawled and fought in the dirty little quayside grog shops. Peter Coö, however, was so well behaved that Robin began to wonder if his repentance were real after all. True, he was the most unhandy creature that ever tangled himself in a rope, but he was civil and smooth, and never got into a drunken quarrel. Robin was glad he had held his tongue about him.

Finally came a day when Rastell openly accused Ravyn of deliberately wasting time.

'What 's your game, man?' he demanded. 'The days are passing, and already we've lost a fair wind. D'ye want the gales to catch us in the broad Atlantic? First one excuse and then another—we shall never be off at this rate.'

'It 's not my fault if I can't get good seamen to sail on a wild-goose chase,' retorted Ravyn.

'Wild-goose chase! Why, you knew all about it before ever we started—what 's changed you now?'

'A scheme may look different when you see it afar off from what it 's like close to,' growled Ravyn. 'Folks hereabouts say there 's naught to be made out of the north-west voyage—there 's none on those coasts but savages and bears.'

'What do you know of it!' Rastell exclaimed angrily. 'Have you never heard of the rich kingdoms the Spaniards found inland? Why should there not be even richer further north? There must be a way through to the East Indies if one sails north enough, and who knows what wondrous lands we shall find on the way?'

'True,' put in Master Howting, 'I myself have talked with Sebastian Cabot, and he swore there were fair coun-

tries rich with the fruits of the earth—very likely gold and jewels too—could one but find the way. Master More, too, has talked with many a voyager when he was a-visiting the Low Countries and has written a book about it.’

‘Pah!’ interrupted Rastell. ‘What should an unlettered boor like yon purser know of More’s vision of Utopia? Enough of all this, Ravyn. You have your orders—it ’s for you to carry ’em out.’

‘Nay, but,’ Ravyn persisted (Robin noticed that he scowled angrily at being called an unlettered boor), ‘I can show ye a quicker way to gain wealth than by this unchancy voyage to God knows where. If ye ’ll but follow my advice, I can ship ye as many good handy sailors, willing men and experienced, as ye need. If not, I ’ll not answer for it.’

‘What is your plan?’ asked the master, who had not spoken before. Robin’s heart gave a jump. Were they, after all, not to sail in search of Utopia on the track of Cabot’s ship? Anything else would be a bitter disappointment.

‘It ’s this,’ Ravyn turned from his employer and spoke directly to the master. ‘Ye know that this part of the country has a wealth of tin? Now in France tin fetches good prices. Why not dispose of your silks and cloth and mercery wares to the gentry round about, who ’ll pay good prices for it, take aboard a cargo of tin, and sail southward for Bordeaux? It ’ a good way and a known way, with a safe profit at the end of it, and better than all your moonshiny back-o’-beyond countries—Utopia or whatever ye call ’em—across a waste o’ waters dangerous to ships. And who knows if ye ’ll find aught worth having at the end of it?’

‘There ’s somewhat in what he says.’ The master, slow-moving and ox-like, turned his eyes on Rastell and Howting. But Rastell was in a royal rage, and Howting, in his quieter way, just as angry.



'Do we command this voyage, or do you?' Rastell shouted. 'Are we to change our well-laid plans for any greedy, covetous, cowardly fancy of a hired purser? You, captain, your business is to sail the ship—it's for us to say whither she goes. Let's have no more of this.'

'Very true, very true,' agreed Howting. 'This expedition is to the New Found Lands, to open new markets and to make new discoveries, to the glory of England and the honour of the King's Majesty, and there's an end on 't.'

'Well, if you say so, so it must be,' sighed the captain. 'It is for you to give the orders.' He heaved himself up. 'We've got four men out o' the six, and they'll ha' to do.'

'We sail to-morrow, if the wind holds,' ordered Rastell.

'And if the voyage comes to ruin, don't you go blaming me,' said Ravyn angrily, and swung out of the cabin.

That evening the men were rounded up and brought aboard, a blear-eyed crew, many of them with broken heads after their rioting ashore. Sullen and reluctant, they went about their duties, slackly, huddling into knots when they got the chance and whispering, with sidelong glances over their shoulders. Robin, glad as he was that Rastell's purpose held, felt uneasy, and told Rastell so.

'They'll be better when we get to sea,' Rastell assured him. 'Sailors in port are always discontented. What they need is work for their hands to keep their minds quiet.'

Certainly, when next day the great sails swelled and the ship moved slowly out of Falmouth harbour, things brightened up considerably. The men had slept off their liquor and moved about briskly. The sun shone, the wind was fair, and Robin's heart bounded at the thought that they were really off at last.

All went well that first day. They rounded the Lizard, the coasts of Cornwall fell away, and they were out in the open sea, heading north-west in the direction of Ireland. Some of the crew, also Master Howting, had a slight return of sea-sickness, but it passed off more quickly than before.

Robin, darting about among the sailors and putting his new knowledge to the test, was gloriously happy. When he clambered up to the maintop-castle to visit the look-out, and saw nothing all about him on every side but the shifting foam-streaked pattern of waters, always different yet everlastingly the same, he fairly shouted for joy.

But as he swung himself down the ratlines he noticed something that took the edge off his pleasure—Peter Coo in close talk with John Ravyn, and an expression on both their faces that Robin did not like. Ravyn wore his usual one-eyed scowl, but his lips smiled uglily; and Peter had a sneaking, leering look as he turned his head up sideways fawningly, listening to what Ravyn had to say.

Robin, on his way to the cabin, took care to pass close behind them. He could not catch what Ravyn said, but he heard Coo's answer.

'That 'll be easy, Master Ravyn. More 'n half o' them are ripe for trouble a'ready. You just leave it to me.'

Only Howting was in the cabin, looking rather queasy still and trying to occupy himself with a book. Robin went straight to the point.

'Master Howting,' he said gravely, 'there's something I think Master Rastell and you should know.'

Howting looked over the top of his book, his long pale face and ruffled hair reminding Robin of a sheep looking over a wall.

'What is it now?' he asked anxiously.

'Have I your leave to fetch Master Rastell? I'd like to tell you both together.'

'He's on the poop with the master. Yes, ask him to come to the cabin. Dear a dear, is there new trouble? I thought we had had enough.'

Robin ran up the ladder leading on to the high-built poop in the stern of the ship, where Rastell was animatedly holding forth to the master.

'Just so, sir. Very true, sir. As you say, sir,' the

master answered stolidly, and Robin got the idea that he wished Master Rastell would go away and leave him to his business. He plucked at Rastell's cloak.

'If you please, sir—Master Howting asks, will you come to the cabin?'

'Anon, anon. And isn't it true, captain, that it's worth a slight risk to have the honour and glory of finding, perchance, a new land . . . all right, Robin, I'll come. Think it over, captain.' He clambered down the ladder—he was finding his sea legs excellently—and Robin followed at a jump.

'Now then, Howting, what's the matter?' asked Rastell on entering the cabin.

'It's this boy here—he says there's something we should know. I do hope—'

'It's just this, sir,' said Robin. 'Peter Coo's aboard.'

'Peter Coo—what, the fellow who kidnapped Dick Parkyn? Why, Robin, how long have you known this? Why didn't you tell me before?'

Robin explained. 'It was no use my telling you, anyway,' he added. 'We were well away to sea before I knew.'

'I'd have had him thrown off the ship at Falmouth! And yet—I don't know.' Rastell ran his fingers through his hair. 'With such a crew of scoundrels as we've got, one more or less would seem to make no difference. As you say, he behaved himself quietly enough. But why d'you tell me now?'

'Because I caught him talking with John Ravyn, and I believe he means mischief.' Robin described what he had seen. Howting lifted up his voice and mourned.

'This is an ill-starred voyage of ours, Rastell. I doubt if we shall ever bring it to a fortunate end.'

'Tilly-vally, man, do you lose heart at a few rubs? There never was an adventurer yet that didn't meet with a peck of trouble. Keep a bold face and we'll win through. But this fellow Coo will want watching, that's a fact.'

We'll keep an eye on him, and, Robin, you can help us there. I'm right glad I brought you.'

'Should we speak with Richard Spicer on the *Mary Barking*?' suggested Howting.

'She's too far off from us to send a boat,' Rastell answered with a worried frown. 'Indeed, I doubt if she could read a signal. We'll have to wait till she comes up, if indeed she does before we get to Waterford. She's not so swift as the *Barbara*. Otherwise I'd transfer Coo aboard her—maybe he'd only make mischief there as well, though.'

During the next few days things certainly went awry. The wind turned contrary, and the unwieldy merchant ships had much ado to keep any sort of course for Ireland. The *Mary Barking* dropped out of sight altogether; and Coo began making mischief. He was continually quarrelling with the seasoned sailors, though it was difficult to say who began the row. Coo, of course, complained that the others started it—he was sorely put upon and knocked about because he wasn't as handy as some.

'As though I could help that! I'm sure I'm willing enough, but I've never been on the open sea afore. That's not my fault. I'll learn, give me but a fair chance. But how can a poor fellow do his work when he's knocked about the head with a belaying-pin?'

On the other hand, the sailors declared that Coo was for ever getting in their way, tripping them, or carrying out orders wrongly on purpose. No one could possibly be such a fool as he pretended to be!

With the recruits, the ragamuffins and malcontents hired by Ravyn, Peter Coo was on the best of terms. Robin was always finding two or three of them in a huddle, and though he could not hear what they said—they took care of that—the tone of their grumbling voices and the look on their faces told enough.

It began to be clear that the ship was ripe for mutiny.

## CHAPTER XIX

### MUTINY

‘A SAIL! A sail!’

At the look-out’s cry Rastell and Howting, who had been gloomily conferring in the cabin, sprang up and made for the poop. Robin followed, though he had no business to do so. It was something of interest, anyhow, after seven stormy, anxious days of nothing but sea and sky around them, and a shipload of men who daily grew more threatening and rebellious.

‘An Irish merchantman, by the looks of her.’ The master passed his glass to Rastell, who squinted awkwardly through it, and after some difficulty brought it to bear on the distant sail. All the men saving those on immediate duty crowded into the waist of the ship and hung over the bulwarks, craning to see what they could.

‘Well laden, too, by the way she rides,’ Rastell observed, and handed the glass on to Howting. ‘Where would she be making for?’

‘Waterford, the same as us,’ the captain answered. ‘But we ’ll be there first—she wallows like an old sow. She ’s off the Mediterranean voyage, I should judge, with a cargo of silks and spices from the east for the Irish gentry. Their kerns go barelegged in saffron kilts, but the nobles like to rig themselves out as fine as King Harry’s court.’

‘We have the speed of her, I take it!’ Ravyn had come up on the poop unnoticed, and now spoke abruptly.

‘Overhauling her fast,’ answered the master with a stare that said, ‘What business is that of yours?’

‘Masters all’—Ravyn took a step forward—‘there lies your chance to save yourselves.’ He pointed at the Irish ship.

‘What d’ ye mean, fellow?’ rapped out Rastell, swinging round on him. ‘What ’s that ship to do with us?’

'Listen!' Ravyn held up his hand, and those on the poop heard an ugly sound coming from below—a sort of low snarling like that of a dog that sees a juicy bone, and fears he won't get it. 'The men are sick of this voyage. They see no profit in it. For a very little they would rebel. Now yonder is a fat prize. We are swift and we are armed—what is easier than to overhaul her before she can make port, seize her cargo, and give the men something to go on with? They'll eat out of your hand if you will but let them take a prize.'

To Robin's surprise it was the quiet Master Howting who got out his answer first. Rastell was so amazed at this impudence that his breath was quite taken away.

'So that's what you've been aiming at these many days!' Howting said. 'You and your creature Coo! Making the men discontented so that you can force us to turn pirate on the king's waters! What in heaven's name do you take us for? You deserve to be clapped in irons.'

'Hanged, hanged, good Master Howting.' Rastell had got his voice back. 'And so he will be, or never trust me. Captain -'

'Ask your pardon, sir,' said the master stolidly, 'but I can't do that. You can't hang a man but for mutiny or murder—and he haven't mutinied nor he haven't murdered.'

'Piracy's a hanging matter,' said Rastell quickly.

'But he'd have to be tried for it - and he haven't done no more than talk. I can put him in irons if you like, but I don't advise it, seeing the temper of the men.'

Indeed, the position looked ugly. The men were not staring at the Irish ship now, but up at the poop, as though waiting for some signal which would either send them back to their tasks, or forward in a rush to overwhelm whoever opposed them. Robin found himself shivering, not exactly with fear, but with excitement and suspense. He

looked at the master, standing there stolidly, neither helping nor hindering. *He* was no good! If the men took things into their own hands, he would swim with the stream and carry out their wishes. If Rastell and Howting got their way, he would continue to serve them. It was nothing to him, either way. And Rastell and Howting, Robin could tell, were perplexed. Neither of them had the least intention of turning pirate, but neither of them could fetch up just the right words. To say the wrong thing would be to drop a spark into the powder. As for Ravyn, he waited, sure that in one way or another he would get what he wanted. It was queer, standing on that lurching poop deck, with the wind and sea all about one, and the *Barbara* steadily gaining on the unsuspecting Irish merchant ship, to think that those shiny little guns that lay so quiet might soon belch forth flame and death! Those little guns that had been his bedfellows in the jolting wagon; the pride of Tom and his father—if their very first use should be an act of piracy!

Then Robin shifted his gaze to the men below. In the background were the regular sailors, well disposed on the whole, but too few, helpless against the rabble that Ravyn had collected. Most of the faces turned up to the poop were sullen, or nervous, or wolfishly eager. There was Peter Coo, white-faced as usual—he did not seem to put on any sea-tan. Now that it came to the point he was scared, of course. Peter was good at making trouble, but bad at facing it when it came. Looking down at them all, Robin was reminded of the crowd in the torch-light on the night of the May Day riots. These men were exactly like that—greedy, frightened, excited, uncertain. A thought came to him—Coo had been among the rioters. Perhaps there were others. . . . Suddenly he knew what to say.

His high, piercing boy's voice cut through the ominous silence.

'Remember Evil May Day! Remember the gallows in

London city, and the heads on Temple Bar!’ He swung round on Ravyn. ‘Remember how John Lincoln died!’

There was a sound between a gasp and a groan from the mass of the men. Robin was right—many of them had been there, and, like Coo, were marked men in spite of the king’s pardon. All the others had heard what happened, made all the worse by much re-telling. They looked at one another, dismayed. Robin’s words had brought home to them just what their proposed deed would mean—exile for ever from home, or a likely hanging if they tried to return. Some of them were desperate enough to face even that, but most were just the usual sheeplike, unthinking crowd.

John Ravyn started, swore, and slapped his hand to his dagger. For two pins he would have spitted Robin then and there, but Rastell’s hand came down on his wrist, and at the same time one of the sailors—a particular friend of Robin’s—roared from his perch in the ratlines:

‘You dare hurt our Robin, and we’ll pitch you overboard! He’s the luck of the ship, he is!’

And then, to finish the work, came a gust of wind that sent the ship, half manned as she was, heeling dangerously over. Instantly the master came to life. To him the ship was the only thing that mattered.

‘Every man about his job!’ he shouted, and loosed a volley of orders that sent the men scurrying like monkeys into the shrouds until the vessel was righted. Ravyn took a flying leap off the poop into the body of the ship, and disappeared. The danger was over for the present.

‘You took a long chance, Robin!’ Rastell clapped the boy on the shoulder. ‘But, as it happened, it was the right one.’

‘How came you to think of that?’ asked Master Howting curiously, and Robin gave a quick smile.

‘You see, sir,’ he explained, ‘I came mighty near to being hanged myself!’ And then, of course, Howting had to have the whole story. It sent Robin up in his opinion.



But though that crisis was safely past, all knew that the trouble was by no means over. The bickering and quarrels among the crew went on, with Coo suspected as being at the bottom of it, but always wriggling his way out of direct proof. Ravyn was silent and sullen, though he put forward no more get-rich-quick suggestions. It was not a happy ship.

So they sailed up the long estuary into Waterford, and anchored, to wait for the *Mary Barking*. Then it was discovered that, through careless lading, bilge-water had got into the flour and half of it was uneatable. Afterwards Robin wondered whether this *was* really an accident, but the awkward cargo space of the ships of that period made dry storage very difficult at the best of times. At all events it was necessary to replace the spoiled stuff, so Master Rastell went ashore to bargain for grain in the town, while Master Howting remained on board to give an eye to things.

'Would you care to come ashore with me, Robin?' Rastell asked, expecting an eager assent. But Robin shook his chestnut head.

'Reckon I'd better bide,' he said. 'Master Howting can't have his eyes and ears everywhere.'

'Ho!' smiled Rastell, 'you think to play the watch-dog—watch-puppy I should say perhaps, for your teeth are hardly grown. Have a care, Robin! You have made enemies enough, and now the men know that you are on the alert, they are not likely to do any plotting where you can hear.'

'Reckon I can guard myself,' returned Robin cockily. He was a little above himself with his recent success.

'Well, have a care, for Waterford harbour is deep. I think you had better come with me.'

But Robin had made up his mind to stay. So Rastell dropped over the side into his waiting boat and was rowed to shore.

Robin provided himself with a hook and line, and settled

himself on the bulwarks to fish. It was a pleasant occupation, and one that did not prevent him from taking in the misty green of the hills on which patches of heather were beginning to turn purple, the clustered houses about the quayside, and where the old tower, built, it was said, by Reginald the Dane, stood up round and strong above the thatched roofs; and above all the fascinating coracles made of wicker-work covered in hide in which the shock-headed natives darted about so expertly. Unintelligible Irish cries floated up to him at intervals. He flattered himself that, hidden as he was by a pile of canvas, he was not likely to be noticed by the crew, and might overhear something useful.

He was quite right. Presently he became aware of a quiet slither of bare feet behind him as a number of men began to gather in the waist of the ship. Not a word was spoken—they all came together purposefully as if according to some plan. Robin sat tense, his ears strained to catch every sound. Something certainly was in the wind.

Then he heard Ravyn's voice, low-pitched but quite clear, as if he did not care whether or not any one were listening.

'Well, boys, here we all are. I've locked old Howting in his cabin, so *he* can't interfere, and captain'll do what we wish—*he* don't care for this voyage any more 'n we. So let's get all clear afore Master Printer Rastell comes back—he'd better ha' stuck to his press.' There was a low laugh at this. 'Now mind, I'm not asking ye to do anything against the law!—I know some of ye have queasy consciences, and others of ye suffer from white livers. But I do say this, it's throwing our lives away to venture into unknown seas in search of wealth that mayn't be there, on the word of a silly dreamer!'

There was a low growl of agreement.

'Very well, then. This is what we say to Master Rastell—either he promises to sail with us on a proper trading

voyage, where there's good profits to be made and no more than ordinary risks, or we take over the ship and sail her ourselves.'

'Why not leave 'im behind?' called out someone.

'Fool!' pounced Ravyn. 'We've got to have that flour he's gone to get. I don't say but what an accident might happen——'

'None o' that!' one of the old hands snapped. 'We're with you about the madness of the north-west voyage—but we'll have no murder on our hands.'

'Who said anything about murder?' Ravyn backed out swiftly. 'No, all we want is that he shall give up this voyage, and that we'll see to.'

Robin was thinking furiously. If only he could get away to warn Rastell! Even if he did so, was there anything to be done? Still, Rastell might see a way out if only he were given time to think. But here was Robin trapped on the *Barbara*. He looked down at the deep green water under the ship's side and shuddered. He knew no more of swimming than a few floundering strokes on the river Wey above the bridge. No, he could never make the shore. If he hailed one of those fellows in the coracles? But that would call attention to himself—and besides, he couldn't speak their language. He did not realize that, Waterford being mainly a town of English settlers, the Irishmen would have understood him very well.

Something—he never knew what, perhaps a faint sound behind him that his ears caught but his brain did not attend to—made him duck sideways suddenly. The blow that would have fallen on his head fell instead on his shoulder, but it was enough to overbalance him. For an awful second he wavered about that dark green water, screamed, clutched at something, and fell; for the thing that he clutched came with him.

The water closed over his head and swept away his senses.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE WAY BACK

HE came to in horrible pain and sickness, lying face downward on hard cobbles and vomiting sea water until it seemed as if all his insides would be washed away. He tried to lift his face off the stones that bruised it, and someone raised him up and put a rough cloak under his head. In that moment he saw, as if through a dark veil, a still white face turned up to the sky and thought he knew it. But before he could put a name to it darkness came down again.

When next he knew anything he was lying in his own cramped quarters on board the *Barbara*, the timbers of the poop deck only a few feet above him.

'Come, that's better!' said Master Rastell's voice. 'Now a sip of this, and we shall do well.' The 'sip' was brandy in milk, and it made Robin feel sick again. But after a few minutes it took effect, and he was able to ask a question.

'Where's John Ravyn?'

'In irons,' answered Rastell grimly, 'and a good few of his messmates with him. Think no more of him.'

'Then—we can sail for Utopia?' Robin's words were mixed, but Rastell knew what he meant.

'Nay,' he said sadly, 'unless Utopia be England, which I very much doubt. Though we can charge Ravyn and some of them with mutiny, the rest are unwilling, and I can't get men enough here to make up the crew. I'm sorry, lad, but it's home again for us.'

Tears of disappointment and weakness slid from under Robin's eyelids. 'I can't bear—to go back!' he murmured. Then he remembered that Rastell's own disappointment must be bitter, and tried to pull himself together.

'I'm grieved for you. I wish I could ha' managed better,' he murmured. 'But I can't swim far.'

'Boy, there was nothing you could ha' done. The voyage was doomed from the start, as I see now. For such an enterprise you need not only a high heart but a skilled hand and brain and a knowledge of the ways of the sea. You did your best, Robin, so don't fret.'

'But I was a cocksure fool,' said Robin with a feeble grin. 'To think o' letting myself be shoved overboard like that! And me so proud o' my listening and thinking to save the ship. It serves me right. Who was it pushed me? Wait!' A memory of that white face upturned, seen in his half swoon, came back to him. 'It was Peter Coo!' he whispered, averted. 'And he is dead?'

'Yes, he is dead. You clutched him as you fell and pulled him over with you. When the sailors heard you scream they went after you—they're fond of you, you know. Heaven knows why, for if ever there was an imp! They pulled you out just in time, but Coo they let be until an Irishman hauled him in at the tail of his coracle, stone-dead. And that's enough talking for now. Lie still, ye plague spot.'

But Robin had one more question, and he asked it with a twinkle.

'How soon did Master Howting get out of his cabin?'

'Not until he had pounded his knuckles raw! With all that pother there was about you he was clean forgot until I came aboard, and was told all that had happened. In a way, your bath in the harbour did us a good turn, for it made the better-minded sailors break off from Ravyn and his crew and lay the whole matter before me openly. Now, *will* you be quiet and sleep?'

It did not take Robin long to get over his drenching. Next day he was almost as fit as ever, but in very low spirits. So, indeed, was everybody, even the crew who had got their way and were to sail for home. They went about their duties shamefacedly, knowing in their hearts

that they had refused a great adventure. Masters Rastell and Howting was naturally greatly downcast. Only the master was as stolid and indifferent as he had always been. Master Spicer, the third partner, when he sailed into Waterford harbour a day later, having been blown off his course, put on a great show of rage and threatened to sail for the New Found Land alone; but Robin noticed that it did not take a deal of argument to persuade him to do no such thing.

The *Barbara* and the *Mary Barking* remained for several days at Waterford, for it was necessary to sell off as much as possible of the goods they had brought with them. This was not difficult, for the town and countryside was full of families of English descent, settled 'here from time to time since the days of Henry II; and they were wealthy from the trade brought to the excellent harbour. But, since it was a forced sale, prices were not high.

'However,' said Master Howting, trying to be cheerful, 'maybe we have done better than we should ha' done 'tother side the Atlantic. We might not ha' found those lands of gold Master Cabot dreamed of; or if we did, their people might not be so well-manncred as those of Master More's Utopia.'

Which might comfort a merchant, but did not cheer Robin up at all. He spent a good deal of his time up in the maintop, staring over the green rolling Irish country, wondering if it would be a good plan to run off and hide among the hills until the ships had sailed, and then to hang about the quayside on the off chance of getting taken aboard a vessel bound on some adventure. For he could not see that there was anything hopeful waiting for him in England.

Master Rastell had noticed his brooding, and sent for him one day to the cabin. When Robin appeared, listless and rather pale, he took him by the chin and forced his face up so that he could look into his eyes.

'What, Robin? In the dumps?' he asked with kindly sternness.

Robin, to his great disgust, found his eyes filling with tears. But he answered nothing.

'Afraid to go home and be whipped—is that it?' went on Rastell, half seriously.

That stung the boy.

'It's *not* that,' he said indignantly. 'But—but—I have made such a muddle of my life!'

'What, at fourteen? It's too soon a while to say that. True, you've been a bit of a fool.'

'I have!' agreed Robin heartily.

'But all's not lost. Look, lad—I don't yet know what's best, but I believe you have good stuff in you. You're rash and over-quick in the temper, but you have good sense too. I promise you this, that I'll stand by you, and somehow we'll put you in the way of making your living in a way that's fitting for you. More I can't say till I've talked with your father and your uncle——'

'Uncle Parkyn? He'll have no good word for me,' Robin burst out.

'He may not have dealt well by you, but did you deal well by him? However, it was not of him that I was thinking but of your uncle Beckingham.'

'I had clean forgot him,' said Robin slowly. 'I've seen little of him, and doubt if——'

'It's my belief that he thinks well of you. However that may be, trust me we'll find a way for you. So now—no running away, d'ye hear? Take your potion like a man.'

'How did you guess?' asked Robin, startled. Rastell laughed and tweaked his ear.

'It was writ in your eyes,' he said.

After that talk Robin put the idea of escape out of his head. But nothing could prevent the return voyage from being rather a dismal affair. The weather was bad—

squally and wet, with choppy seas and variable winds—all the way up the Channel; and the nearer they drew to home the more Robin dreaded the day that he would go ashore. He did not want to face anybody, not even Tom and Dick. For they knew quite definitely what they wanted to do—Dick to be a scholar and a schoolmaster, Tom to succeed his father as the ironmaster of Abinger. While he, Robin, had failed in his most cherished dream and could see nothing before him but some sort of dull apprenticeship.

So, on a dull September morning, the *Barbara* and the *Mary Barking* made their way carefully up the estuary of the Stour to Sandwich. The silting up of the harbour, which had already blocked the passage between the Isle of Thanet and the mainland, was now threatening the famous port of Sandwich itself.

As they neared the quay, it seemed to Robin (up in the maintop as usual) that there was rather a larger crowd than might be expected gathered to await the ships' arrival. And then, with a thrill that went all through him, he recognized a slight figure, one shoulder higher than the other—the very last man he would have expected to greet them!

In a moment he was over the side of the top-castle and swinging himself down hand over hand by the ratlines. Without ceremony he burst into the cabin where Rastell and Howting were attending to last-minute matters, remembered his manners in time to bow, and then gasped out:

'Sirs! Sirs! Master Thomas More is on the quay!'

'Master More! Are ye sure, boy? What can have brought him hither?' from Master Howting; and:

'Thomas! My brother here? Well, I'd as soon face him at once as later,' cried Rastell. And both hurried on deck to make sure.

There was no doubt, it was Thomas More. And no



sooner had the *Barbara* berthed than he came aboard, hurrying with his quick uneven step, and grasped his brother-in-law by both hands. But yet another surprise was in store for Robin, for close behind More stalked the tall bearded figure of his uncle, Richard Beckingham. Robin caught hold of a stanchion and wondered if he were dreaming.

Out of the swirl of questions and answers between the men, his dazed ears picked out a few sentences.

'Aye, Thomas, all in vain! We never got near your Utopia——'

'A plague on that fellow Ravyn! Ye did right to warn us——'

'I'm here on a matter of the silting up of the harbour—the citizens complain that all the trade is passing to Hythe nowadays——'

'His Majesty the king was pleased to empower a commission to look into the matter——'

'Ah!' said one of the sailors to Robin, 'tis all along o' that church steeple they've putten up at Tenterden.'

'Why, you fool,' put in the boatswain, 'what could the church steeple at Tenterden have to do with the silting up of Sandwich?'

'Dunno how, but so 'tis,' persisted the sailor. 'Afore that there steeple was built, Sandwich was the first port in Kent. Arter they put 'un up, Hythe gets all the trade. So there you are!'

Robin chuckled—and looked round to find his uncle standing over him.

'So there you are, my runaway nephew!' he greeted the boy grimly. 'And what have you to say for yourself, after all the teen you've caused your good father and your loving mother? They've been near distracted in their wits about you.'

Robin hung his head; but Master Rastell, whose sharp eyes missed nothing, laid his hand on Beckingham's arm.

'Come away to my cabin and drink a cup of wine while I tell you the story,' he urged. 'It's a young scapegrace, I know, but a fine mettled lad for all that, and worth more than to stand with a cloth-yard in 's hand, shouting "What d' ye lack?"'

Robin was left to stifle his uncomfortable thoughts by making himself as useful as possible. After an hour, when the party emerged from the cabin and made for the gang-planks, Master Rastell beckoned Robin to follow.

'You 'll lodge with me till I can hand you safe over to your lawful guardians,' he said, and Robin got no more encouragement than that. He passed a pretty worried day; but after supper his uncle summoned him to his own private room at the inn.

'Well,' he began, 'I've heard the other side of the story now.'

Robin, shuffling his feet uncomfortably just inside the door, looked up with a gleam of hope.

'Why did you run away, you little fool, and leave us all to think the worst?' demanded his uncle. 'Come here!' he added in a changed voice. Robin came and stood at his knee. 'I had a mind to wash my hands of you altogether,' Beckingham went on. 'I'll not deny I was most grievously disappointed in you. But I see I judged somewhat hastily. Now then—it seems you have no great liking for the clothier's trade?'

'Not with my uncle Parkyn' Robin said firmly.

'But what would you say to that of a grocer?'

'With you, sir?' Robin looked up. 'I would do my best.'

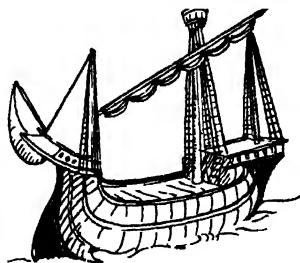
'But are not over-cager? Is the sea still in your bones? I'd have thought you had been cured of all that.'

Robin said nothing.

'Ha! I see you have the sea-fever badly, if it remains after all you've been through. Well, see here, I promise nothing, mind, for it rests with your father—and when I

came to Sandwich I had no notion I should be the one to welcome the prodigal home! But how would you like it if I took you into my house to learn the ways of the trade for a couple of years, and after sent you a-seafaring? 'Twouldn't be to the New Found Lands, I fear, but southward ho to the Mediterranean, to meet the spice caravans from out the east—for, say I, why should the Venetians have it all their own way? I need a trusty fellow for my ventures, and one that knows something of the sea wouldn't come amiss. And I've no son of my own, Robin. What do you say?'

Robin's answer was to drop on one knee and kiss his uncle's hand.



A TUDOR SHIP

## CHAPTER XXI

### GUESS WHAT

TEN years later, a new schoolmaster came to take charge of the new grammar school at Guildford. It was not yet the handsome building which to-day is the pride of the town, but it was very much pleasanter and more roomy than the small dark place in which we first met with Tom, Dick, and Robin.

The new schoolmaster was slim, fair-headed, and only twenty-four, but Brother Geoffrey did not seem at all vexed at turning over his pupils to him.

'Ah, Ricardus, Ricardus, Oxford has been the making of you, as I knew it would,' he said, when he had introduced Dick to the boys and granted them a half-holiday to celebrate the occasion.

'I'll not forget who started me, master,' Dick answered gratefully.

'Nor the old whipping-post, eh, Dick?' A tall, leather-coloured, loose-jointed young man, who was still the old Tom Elrington, grown larger, slapped the post with a broad hand, and a blue-eyed lady at his side laughed out gaily:

'I'll lay you learned more from that post than from your book,' she cried.

'And more from you than from either, my dear,' retorted Tom.

'Two months is but a short time to learn in. Wait till she has had you in hand for a year,' put in the lady's brother.

'Be quiet, Owen, and don't meddle between me and Tom!' Beatrice Elrington, that was once Beatrice Bray, snuggled her hand into the crook of her young husband's arm.

'So two of you, at least, have got your heart's desire,' Brother Geoffrey smiled. 'That is, if Richard can be content to stay in Guildford town, and not be hankering after London or Oxford——'

'Indeed, I'm glad to be away from them,' said Dick quickly. 'London is too rowdy a place for my tastes.'

'And you, Thomas?' said Brother Geoffrey. 'No doubt you are well content—you have both the lady and the land now, and I hear your water-hammer is bringing you great fortune.'

'That and hard work a-plenty.' But Tom grinned in a pleased way. His name was already the best-known among the ironmasters of Surrey. 'I know what all of us are thinking,' he went on more gravely. 'Would that our Robin were here to make up our trio!'

'Master Beckingham had no news of the ship when last I saw him. If she has foundered his own loss will be heavy—but it's Robin he cares most about.'

'He was full young to be made master of a vessel,' said Brother Geoffrey, 'Twas rash in Master Beckingham——'

'Our Robin's as good a sailor as ever hauled on a lanyard,' began Dick indignantly, and was interrupted by a gale of laughter from the doorway.

'Eh, Dickon, Dickon, if I were no better a sailor than those words prove ye, I'd ha' been cast away long afore this!'

'Robin!' shouted Dick and Tom, and hurled themselves on him. He flung one arm about each of them and stood, sturdy legs apart as if still braced to the roll of the deck, bronzed and lithe, and with a little curly copper-coloured beard fringing his laughing lips and firm chin.

'So you thought I was drowned fathoms deep, did you? No more faith in me than that? No, but contrariwise! I've made a lucky voyage, lads, and my good uncle can retire if he's a mind to on the profits of it. As for me—'

he rocked his friends to and fro, still laughing—'guess what.'

'Married the sultan's daughter?' guessed Tom, poking him in the ribs.

'Found Sir Thomas More's Utopia?' Dick suggested.

'Now after that,' Robin complained, 'my news'll sound small beer indeed!'

'Well, out with it, whatever it is,' said Tom.

'I've made enough by my share of this venture to buy my own ship!' cried Robin.

'Then my guess was the nearest,' Dick said. 'Let go my shoulder, Robin, your grip is too much like that bear we remember of old.'

'And come and greet my lady, whom we first met through that same bear.' Tom dragged Robin forward to make his bow to Beatrice and shake hands with Owen and Brother Geoffrey.

'Will you go sailing to find Utopia, Robertus?' Brother Geoffrey asked, half seriously.

'Poor Sir Thomas!' Robin sighed. 'I know now that once he hoped our England might become Utopia. He was a sad man, though he'd grown so great, when I met him in London. No, sir, I know that Utopia is not to be found on this earth. But there are new countries for the seeking, and maybe we shall need them some day. I am for the north-west passage.'

'You will not gather much wealth by that,' remarked Tom. 'But you never did care for money, Robin.'

'It burns my purse!' Robin confessed.

'So you all three have what you wished for,' Brother Geoffrey summed it up. 'Richard and Thomas have done much as I thought they would, but I never could see which way you'd go, Robert. It's fitting that you should sail away into the northern mists.'

'Come home with me, and drink to our success,' Dick invited them. 'Oh, my father has forgiven you, Robin.'

He said the other day that you were right, and he 'd have done better to heed you. Come and make it up with the poor old man.'

'I bear him no grudge,' said Robin. 'Didn't he set me on the way to the sea, little as he thought it?'

'Tom, you 'll bring your lady? Come, Owen! Brother Geoffrey——'

'Nay, I've done my part. I'm going back to my library. Good fortune, my pupils all, and God's blessing!'



A TUDOR LADY

## UNUSUAL WORDS

ANGEL	Gold coin bearing the figure of the Archangel Michael. Worth about ten shillings
APOTHECARY	Druggist. Sometimes acted as a doctor
ARRANT	Thorough
BALK	Refuse to go on
BARBAROUS	Savage
BELAYING-PIN	Bar to which ropes are fastened
BILGE-WATER	Dirty water in the bottom of a ship
TO BOOT	Also
BOOTLESS	Useless
BUCKLER	Round shield. 'Bucklers'—a mock fight with shields and staves
BURGESS	Citizen
CANDLEMAS	2nd February
CAPON	Roasting-fowl
CARRACK	Large merchant ship
CHAFFERING	Bargaining
COIL	Mess, confusion
COMPTLR	Prison, really for debtors, but sometimes used as a sort of police station to shut up arrested persons for a night or two
CRABBED	Difficult (things), cross (people)
CROSSBOW	A bow from which the arrow was shot by a spring which had to be wound up
CULVERIN	Long cannon
DICKERING	Bargaining
DILEMMA	Puzzle, problem
DOUBLET	Kind of jacket
DROOLING	Dribbling
DUCKING-STOOL	Chair fixed to a long pole, in which a woman who made herself a nuisance by scolding was ducked in a pond
DUFFEL-BAG	Bag made of thick cloth



EXERCITATION	Exercise
FADGE	Turn out
FAIN	Gladly
FALCONET	Small cannon
FEIGN	Pretend
F'ETLOCK	Tuft of hair on the lower part of horse's leg
FIREBACK	Sheet of iron, often beautifully decorated, which was put at the back of the big fireplaces to throw forward the heat
FLEER	Mock at
F'LIBBERTIGIBBET	Restless fellow
FLIPSY	Flimsy, badly made
FUME	Fuss and fret
FUSTIAN	Coarse cloth
GAB	Chatter
GALLANT	Fashionable young man
GANGLING	Lean and awkward
GROAT	Fourpenny piece
GUERDON	Reward
GUILD	A union of the masters and men of one trade, which made rules for making, buying and selling, apprenticeship, and so forth. There were no trade unions as we know them in those days
HARANGUE	Long speech
HITCHING-POST	Post outside houses for tying up horses
HOODMAN-BLIND	Blind-man's-buff
HUCKSTER	Pedlar
HYSTERICIS	Laughing and crying both together, after a shock
IMBRANGLED	Tangled up
INKLING	Hint, slight knowledge
JERKIN	Jacket
JOURNEYMAN	Paid worker
KERN	Irish peasant
KNAVE	Rascal

<b>LIBERTIES</b>	Part of London outside the walls
<b>LOON</b>	Silly fellow
<b>MAINTOP-CASTLE</b>	Place for the look-out man on the main or tallest mast of a ship
<b>MANCHET</b>	Bread roll
<b>MARCHPANE</b>	Almond paste
<b>MARLINE-SPIKE</b>	Pointed piece of iron for separating strands of rope
<b>MARRY</b>	An exclamation
<b>MOPING MUM</b>	Silent and miserable
<b>MULLED ALE</b>	Ale warmed with spices in it
<b>MUMCHANCE</b>	Silent
<b>MUMMER</b>	Actor
<b>MUMMERY</b>	Play-acting
<b>MURRAIN</b>	Cattle disease
<b>OWLERS</b>	Wool smugglers; so called because they worked by night, like owls
<b>PARLEY</b>	Truce for discussion
<b>PATE</b>	Head
<b>PEST</b>	Plague
<b>PIKE</b>	Weapon rather like a knife on a long shaft
<b>PILLORY</b>	Punishment in which a man stood with his head and hands thrust through holes in a board
<b>POMANDER</b>	Ba <sup>11</sup> stuffed with herbs, supposed to keep off infection
<b>POTTER</b>	Commotion, fuss
<b>POTION</b>	Dose of medicine
<b>PROUD-STOMACHED</b>	Haughty
<b>QUEASY</b>	Easily upset
<b>QUILLS</b>	On these yarn was wound to make bobbins for weavers' shuttles
<b>QUIP</b>	Joke
<b>RABBLE</b>	Disorderly crowd
<b>RANDY-DANDY</b>	Noisy fun
<b>RATE</b>	Scold
<b>REVELS</b>	Sports, good times

RHEUM	Cold in the head
SACK	A white wine
SCREED	Writing
SCURVY	Worthless (really means diseased!)
SLIP-GROAT	Played like shove-halfpenny
SMELTING	Melting down the ore to get the iron out
SNICKER	Giggle
STOCKS	Punishment in which a man sat with his legs through holes in a board
SWOUND	Faint
TALLY	Agree
TEEN	Trouble
TESTER	Sixpence
TIDDEN	It isn't (south country)
TILLY-VALLY	Exclamation
TILTING	Mock fight on horseback, with shields and spears; or sometimes practising riding with a spear to hit a dangling ring or dummy figure
TROUBADOUR	Wandering singer
TROUNCED	Beaten
TUMBLER	Acrobat
TURNSPIT	Boy who turned the spit, an iron bar on which meat was roasted in front of the fire
UNCHANCY	Unlucky
WASTREL	Good-for-nothing
WEASAND	Windpipe, throat
WENCH	Girl or woman
WHICKER	Neigh softly
YEOMAN	Well-to-do farmer

# QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

## CHAPTER I

1. How did Tom, Dick, and Robin compare with each other as scholars?
2. Describe how it was that Tom knew so much about Sebastian Cabot.
3. Give a brief account of the incident that caused Brother Geoffrey to reflect that the three boys 'hung together.'
4. 'I shall be a ruined man . . . Would I 'd never taken office.' Who said this, and for what reason?
5. What is a tinder-box?

## CHAPTER II

1. Describe the scene that presented itself to the boys when they reached the place selected for the bear-baiting.
2. Why did Tom scowl at the titled visitors?
3. Give an account of the rescue of the little Mistress Beatrice.
4. 'I don't think I want to marry any of them.' Explain the circumstances in which these words were spoken.
5. Robin was surprised that Tom asked no favour of Sir Edmund for his bravery. What was at the back of Tom's mind?

## CHAPTER III

1. Mention some of the annoying and disagreeable characteristics of Peter Coo.
2. For what especial reason was Richard Becketingham interested in Robin's schooling?
3. Why did Robin not give the alarm when he found that Peter Coo was prowling at night?
4. What were the various reactions of Robin's hearers when he told the story of the bear-baiting?

## CHAPTER IV

1. Mention some of the reasons why the boys felt that the activities of Peter Coo should be investigated.
2. What was the boys' plan for keeping watch on Peter Coo? How did Tom and Dick obtain permission to be out at night?
3. Explain (a) an oster thicket; (b) owlers.
4. What was the 'disgusting London fashion' that offended Robin?

## CHAPTER V

1. State two reasons why the boys decided against calling out the town guard when they saw the owlers.
2. How was Peter Coo overcome, how kept captive, and how did he escape?
3. 'I should ha' remembered it when he answered me so lamb-like.' Who said this, and what did he mean by it?
4. Describe how Robin followed and found Dick.

## CHAPTER VI

1. By what misfortunes did Robin fall into the hands of the owlers?
2. In what way did Robin guide the town guards to the spot where he was held captive by the owlers?
3. How was Robin's absence from home discovered?
4. Retell Dick's story of the chalk quarries.

## CHAPTER VII

1. Explain the circumstances in which each of the following was said:
  - (a) 'He must be the marvel of his age.'
  - (b) 'What call had he to interfere with them as was only a-getting of their living?'

- (c) 'Some day—that's a long way off!'  
 (d) 'It'll be dull without him.'
2. Why had not Mayor Parkyn been among those who rode after the owlers?

### CHAPTER VIII

1. In what way was Ned Elrington ambitious to extend his business?
2. Give an account of Tom's model water-hammer. What is a hammer-pond?
3. For what purpose did Tom's father need charcoal? How and where was it produced?
4. By what stratagem did Tom save his own life?
5. Why did the colliers not help Tom?
6. Say what was the warning that caused Squire Polstead to ride over to Guildford.

### CHAPTER IX

1. Enumerate some of the London streets that are referred to in this chapter.
2. In your own words describe London Bridge as it was in Tudor times.
3. Mention some of the features of Tudor London that contrast sharply with modern conditions.
4. 'Poor uncle Parkyn! Now I am afraid he will have to put up with me.' Who said this, and on what occasion?
5. Why did Robin want to hear Dr. Bell preach?

### CHAPTER X

1. What was Tom's opinion of the London ironsmiths?
2. Mention some of the sights seen by Dick and Robin during their tour of London.
3. Dick had it in his mind to go into the church or to become

a lawyer. What was the advice given to him by the master from Dr. Colet's school?

4. Who was Raphael Hythloday?
5. Relate how Dick met Thomas More.
6. Tell the story of the incident that began with a cry of 'Shovels and spades!'
7. Explain the difference between a crossbow and an arquebus.

## CHAPTER XI

1. 'What have you to do with the sea? Stay safe on dry land and be thankful.' Say who spoke these words, and in what connection.

2. Why did Master Parkyn insist that Robin should leave London though Dick should be allowed to stay?

3. How did Master Parkyn endeavour to ingratiate himself into Thomas More's favour, and with what result?

4. Why was Master Norbrigge molested in the streets of London?

5. Recount the story of the events that caused Robin to become separated from the party that was returning to Guildford.

6. Give an account of Robin's search for Dick. Why was he anxious for his safety?

## CHAPTER XII

1. Tell the story of the incident that served as an excuse for the beginning of the May Day riots.

2. Describe Tom's encounter with Peter Coo.

3. Say what effect Thomas More's speech had upon the mob, and explain why the riots broke out afresh.

4. What was it that caused the rioters to lose heart and to give in?

5. How was Dick found at last?

CHAPTER XIII

1. Relate how Dick was taken captive by Peter Coo, and how he subsequently regained his freedom.
2. Mention some of the ways in which the goldsmith's wife helped Dick and Tom.
3. Why did Tom make 'as long a tale of their adventures as he could' when telling his story to Dick?
4. In what way was order restored to the streets of London?
5. Say what you know of the efforts that were made to assist Robin in his predicament.

CHAPTER XIV

1. Whose decision was it that the captured rioters should be dealt with so harshly?
2. Outline the circumstances under which the following were spoken:
  - (a) 'If you knew the mischief that is made in this realm by strangers you would remedy it.'
  - (b) 'He looks like a butcher's son.'
  - (c) 'I've noticed that men of truly great hearts have generally wide mouths.'
  - (d) 'Like a setting sun with a black cloud across it.'
3. Summarize the events that led to Robin's release.

CHAPTER XV

1. For what various reasons were the three boys not sorry to leave London?
2. 'The end of it will be that no one will buy West Surrey cloth at all.' Who said this, and why?
3. Describe what Robin saw at Ned Elrington's forge.
4. Both Robin and Giles dreaded their return to Master Parkyn. Why?



## CHAPTER XVI

1. Robin had been prepared to take a beating for his carelessness. Why did he run away?
2. 'The trouble is that you are too honest.' What did the speaker mean by these words?
3. Give a brief account of Robin's doings from the time he rode away from his uncle's unt'il he left the Elrington forge.

## CHAPTER XVII

1. Explain the circumstances in which the following words were spoken:
  - (a) 'This is not the time and place for secrets of state.'
  - (b) 'You come pat upon your cue, like the devil in the old play!'
  - (c) 'We are to be comrades after all.'
2. Suggest reasons why Rastell was sympathetic and helpful to Robin.

## CHAPTER XVIII

1. 'If my smile vexes you, why, I 'll weep.' Who said this, and on what occasion?
2. Mention two reasons why Robin did not report Peter Coo's presence to Rastell earlier.
3. Why did the *Barbara* stay so long at Falmouth?
4. What plan did Ravyn suggest in place of the expedition to the New Found Lands?

## CHAPTER XIX

1. What was in Ravyn's mind when he said, 'Masters all, there lies your chance to save yourselves'?
2. Say what share Robin and the master each had in helping to stave off mutiny.

3. 'You think to play the watch-dog.' Who said this, and what did he mean by it?
4. Recount the conversation overheard by Robin as he sat fishing.

## CHAPTER XX

1. Give an outline of Rastell's answers to the questions that Robin asked when he regained consciousness.
2. What surprise awaited Robin when the *Barbara* reached Sandwich?
3. What had Richard Beekingham to say about his nephew's escapade?

## CHAPTER XXI.

Who said the following, and in what connection?

- (a) 'I 'll not forget who started me.'
- (b) 'I know that Utopia 's not to be found on this earth.'
- (c) 'You have both the lady and the land now.'
- (d) 'I 'll lay you learned more from that post than from your book.'

# LITERATURE OF YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

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Far Away and Long Ago <i>W H Hudson</i>	Lord Jim <i>Joseph Conrad</i>
Coco the Clown <i>Lucretia Pothakoff</i>	The Mill on the Floss <i>George Eliot</i>
An Anthology of English Prose	Romola <i>George Eliot</i>
A Century of English Essays	Barchester Towers <i>Anthony Trollope</i>
The Age of Fable <i>Thomas Bulfinch</i>	Lorna Doone <i>R D Blackmore</i>
The Golden Treasury of Longfellow	Pride and Prejudice <i>Jane Austen</i>
Palgrave's Golden Treasury with section of Modern Poems	Sense and Sensibility <i>Jane Austen</i>
Henry Lamond <i>W M Thackeray</i>	Mansfield Park <i>Jane Austen</i>
Vanity Fair <i>W M Thackeray</i>	Emma <i>Jane Austen</i>
Great Expectations <i>Charles Dickens</i>	The Cloister and the Hearth <i>Charles Reade</i>
David Copperfield <i>Charles Dickens</i>	Quentin Durward <i>Sir Walter Scott</i>
Barnaby Rudge <i>Charles Dickens</i>	Kentworth <i>Sir Walter Scott</i>
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Jane Eyre <i>Charlotte Brontë</i>	The Ishman <i>Sir Walter Scott</i>
The Pilgrim's Progress <i>John Bunyan</i>	Rob Roy <i>Sir Walter Scott</i>
Lavengro <i>George Borrow</i>	The Heart of Midlothian <i>Sir Walter Scott</i>
Adam Bede <i>George Eliot</i>	Brother to the Ox <i>Fred Kitchen</i>
Gulliver's Travels <i>Jonathan Swift</i>	The Blue Devils <i>Q</i>
Passages unsuitable for school use (deleted)	Nature in Downland and An Old Thorn <i>W H Hudson</i>
The Last of the Barons <i>Ford Lytton</i>	Further Lessons of Robert Lynd
	The Western Avenue <i>Morley Robert</i>

## FOR INTERMEDIATE AND JUNIOR

And A Dog <i>John Galsworthy</i>	St. John of the Mountains <i>Wendell Phillips</i>
A Poetry Book for Boys and Girls	The Watchers <i>John Galsworthy</i>
From the Bronze South <i>John Galsworthy</i>	Billie Shoes <i>Noel Streatfeild</i>
The Secret Garden <i>John Galsworthy</i>	Westward Ho! <i>Charles Kingsley</i>
Fun and Games <i>John Galsworthy</i>	The Jurfutter's Donkey <i>John Galsworthy</i>
Gain the Hunter <i>Herbert Asquith</i>	Asquith and the Vols <i>Herbert Asquith</i>
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John Galsworthy	Phocion <i>John Galsworthy</i>
She Shall have Music <i>Kitty Laing</i>	Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare
With the Eagles <i>John Galsworthy</i>	
Robin Hood <i>John Galsworthy</i>	
The Trojan Boy <i>John Galsworthy</i>	
Granny's Wonderful Chair <i>Frances Browne</i>	